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ON ARTICLES IN ***NHQ***

WITH A VIEW

TO PUBLICATION AS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NHQ, P.O.Box 3, BUDAPEST 1426, HUNGARY

László Csaba

A Convalescent Economy

With half of its parliamentary term over, we now have more or less enough data to evaluate the two years the democratically elected coalition government has completed in office.

Where the economy and its prospects are concerned, several conflicting views seem to be current. While domestic opinion is unsatisfied and feels a steady decline in the situation, judging the government's performance as weaker than mediocre, foreign opinion as well as international financial circles consider Hungary a good paradigm for the region. Economists from the Central Statistical Office to professional associations surpass one another in their apocalyptic visions, but financial experts, whose stomach ulcers one normally takes for granted, keep issuing victory bulletins. The press is carrying a plethora of articles on the state of families reduced to poverty and harrowed by anxieties about making ends meet, the growth of cash incomes in 1990 and 1991 fell short of inflation by a bare 1–2 per cent. Yet no less than Ft 195,000 million —i.e. almost one quarter of the population's total savings, which amounted to Ft 865,000 million—was accumulated in the single year of 1991. One can read day after day press reports on privatization making no headway, but the fact is that 10 per cent of state enterprises are now in private hands and a further 20 per cent of them are owned by associations. In 1991 the State Property Agency approved the transformation of 189 state firms of a capital value of Ft 418,000 million, and early that year the transformation and sale of another 307 firms was in progress. By comparison it may be pointed out that the privatization programmes of most of the developing countries covered no more than twenty enterprises, and that under the Turkish programme for privatization, considered particularly successful, a total of 48 state-owned firms were transferred to private ownership between 1986 and 1991. The paradoxes could be continued. While unemployment has in the meantime reached 400,000, or 8 per cent, close to the average of the OECD countries, the only large-scale expression of discontent was the October 1990 demonstration and strike by taxi drivers against a rise in petrol prices, a rise which did not affect the poor.

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How do we really stand? In judging the situation, expectations play at least as much a role as performance. In Hungary—similarly to the other Central and Southeast European countries—expectations are usually shaped in accordance with promises made during election campaigns and with the economic thinking underlying them. Since the main obstacles to earlier reforms and to opening up to the international economy were the power structure of a one-party party state, the combination of state-managed property propping up the system and of dependence on a single market, it was simple and attractive to conclude that—by a simple reversal—the market was only a step away. [1]

This can actually be seen as a reverse kind of Marxism, since it expected a rapid transformation of property relations through governmental action, while the time needed for shaping a complex system of grass-root economic and social pressure groups, emphasized by liberal economics, in which they included competition and the market in general, became insignificant.

However, there were counter-examples in plenty: the corrective economic policy in the developing countries—primarily in Latin America—brought important results only after three to ten years, even though it had not been necessary there to transform the whole of the economic system, nor had it been necessary to rearrange the specialization and the established production structure of the various national economies radically and in its major ratios.

At the beginning of the change-over, the Hungarian road of organic transformation, compared to Polish and German shock therapy, appeared slow and sluggish. After two years, however, the advantages of organic development are conspicuous, especially when set against the failures and expenses of the big leap. True, Poland has fought down hyperinflation, but even in 1991 the annual rate of rise in prices was twice as high as the accelerated Hungarian rate. In addition, in the Polish elections the majority of the population turned against the economic policy: there would have been no purpose in continuing it theoretically, in practice this did not happen. In the course of 1990-91, the former GDR received a capital injection equivalent to three to three and a half times the Hungarian GDP, the improvement in living conditions therefore could not be compared to that of the other poor relations. However, it is already out of the question that—as was believed not so long ago[2]—in three or four years the five new Länder that emerged out of East Germany would become parts of full value in a united German economy. True, early in 1992, one-third of East German industry is in private hands, most of the services and commerce are owned by private individuals, but the lag in productivity has not diminished, though wages have risen to two–thirds of those in the West. It is no surprise, then, that concealed and open unemployment covers more than one-third of the economically active population, and production has decreased by about a third. Nor are foreign investors exactly rushing to what was once the model son of what was once the peace camp: about nine–tenths of the firms are being taken over by West German investors. The price is well illustrated by the German property agency's deficit of DM 21,000 million in 1991, and probably DM 210,000 million in 1995.

This small digression may perhaps explain why Hungarian analytic economists are convinced—as against the public—that the changes cannot be artificially accelerated, and the qualitative factors of transformation are more important than speed.[3]

Privatization and practice

Since the change of economic system in most post-socialist countries took place after radical political changes, it is easy to understand why radical, rapid solutions prevail in the proposed theory of transition. The question is how a society of wage labour can as quickly as possible be transformed into a society of owners. Because of the Latin American parallels, particular weight is given to the necessity to avoid a twofold division into a sector of large enterprises dominated by foreign capital and a sector of small enterprises owned by domestic capital. The debate is thus centred on an artificial growth in the number of domestic owners and on limitation by the state of the role of foreign working capital.

Hungary does not fit into this picture. Repeated attempts at reform over many years meant that, by the mid–1980s, public opinion had learned to accept state property as a necessary evil. In spite of recognized contradictions, the system of enterprise councils and the spirit and letter of the laws of transformation have aimed at, and resulted in, a qualitative strengthening of the position of enterprise management and the weakening of the proprietary role of the state and its agencies. The creation of a two–tier banking system, the toleration of small enterprises and a second economy, the liberal handling of foreign capital investment and hard currency accounts, not to mention the social acceptance of the gap between the rich and the poor, meant that public thinking, particularly where it concerned the economy, abandoned socialist ideals as well as the planned economy model which—at least in part—the legal system still treated as valid.

Privatization in Hungary—unlike in Czecho-Slovakia and Rumania—did not start from zero. By the end of 1980 the economy had become monetarized: both management and tens of thousands of entrepreneurs measured their efficiency in money and formed their attitudes and expectations accordingly. A significant second economy, estimated at one-sixth or one-fifth of GDP, had taken shape, and even the legal economy had made marketability—in principle—a requirement, something that was supported by the bankruptcy law, by the primitive capital market, by the system of commercial banks and, from 1988 on, by an intensified opening to the world economy.

The problems of Hungarian privatization arose precisely from this relative advantageous start. In 1987-88, legislators certainly did not reckon with the early demise of "existing socialism", but the end of state-managed ownership appeared to be urgent. For this reason, all kinds of *ersatz* private property were taken up. Most important of these was the provision allowing the transforma-

tion into association and, following organically out of this, "spontaneous privatization". Characteristically, what was usually emphasized in the literature and propaganda of the time is precisely what is now tactfully left unsaid: the transformations create not privately owned firms but, primarily, a kind of mutual or crossed ownership of state firms.

In this phase the key issue was denationalization: understandably the question of the real private proprietor did not even come up. At the same time, the change in the social system of coordinates led to the revaluation of the entire process. As careful analysis shows[4], most potential private owners had been overlooked (along, of course, with the state); the forms of the market economy carry alien substances. An entanglement of creditors and their clientele, cross-ownership of the shares of state enterprises, as well as state monopolies simply turning into private monopolies, understandably did not lead to any increase in efficiency, especially where state agencies kept newcomers out of the market. It is worth noting that the most important part of the agrarian sector was completely left out of the transformation process: up to the end of 1991, only two of the 126 state farms had changed into associations, and where a cooperative farm tried to make the change, politics intervened by legal means.[5]

We have now come to the point which the literature on Hungarian privatization shyly left unsaid and began to discuss only under the pressure of politics: the question as to who should be the capitalist. In the Hungarian transition process, there was legislation to start the transformation, which had been through secret administrative measures by members of the nomenclature, so that a good part of the property of state firms was taken into private ownership by leading executives of the former regime. Specialist opinion —at variance with the political mood—held that the essence was for real private owners to turn up rather than imaginary, (semi–) state proprietors, in whatever manner and from whatever circle.

Among the government forces that emerged with the change of regime, quite the opposite approach gained ground, a natural reaction with the emergence of outsiders, and antipathy towards those who had been insiders. What is more, the state effort to appoint rightful owners is by no means far from the ideas of certain circles within the government. This followed in part also from the fact that the original economic ideas of the three coalition parties crystallised around problems of the internal economy, which they would solve through active state intervention. This was motivated, in the case of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, by the aim of protecting the interests of a domestic entrepreneurial stratum (namely the rising middle class), so as to animate the domestic market: in the case of the Independent Smallholders Party, the motivation was the interests of former proprietors and the agricultural sector that had by then sunk into a profound structural crisis[6]; the Christian Democratic People's Party was concerned with the interests of those who the social network left out of account and, of course, with the churches and pensioners.

Since both "spontaneous privatization" and the participation of foreign capital—especially in the initial period—provided clear and obvious examples

of corrupt practices, the coalition government could not and did not miss the opportunity, by generalizing from those examples, to turn the climate of opinion against those connected with the former leadership who had misappropriated or squandered public property. The Németh government was compelled to set up the State Property Agency and to introduce legislation to protect state property.

Now that the Hungarian privatization debate has come to cover the political and ethical points, which in other post-socialist countries had dominated the field from the very beginning, have there been any substantial changes?

First, the debate shifted from the earlier abstract level of utilitarism to a sentimental, moral and political level. The efficiency and competitive aspects came less and less into question. Secondly, the field was dominated by purely politically motivated proposals, did not at all fit into the earlier course of organic development. Prominent among these is reprivatization and employees' shareholding, as well as the preliminary privatization meant to replace the privatization proper—on the Soviet model—with a leasing right. Squeezed into the category was—with no economic justification at all—the handing over of property to (state-subsidized) social insurance and to local government authorities. The spiritual child of this period is also the idea that the state should, through active programmes of privatization, take in hand the process of its economic retreat.

All these initiatives in the aggregate seemed to be more than they really were. Reprivatization and the employees' share programme first showed their obvious economic limitations, then the Constitutional Court's decision of 30 May 1992 excluded reprivatization from the list of politically feasible measures. As to preliminary privatization, only a few hundred shops of the forty thousand first mentioned as being available were sold. The efficiency of central initiatives is well illustrated by the fact that in 1991 the Existence Credit programme, widely publicised in the press, was made use of in only 71 occasions, and that under this scheme all in all Ft1,000 million was lent[7]. This could even be taken as an efficiency index for the centrally initiated, active privatization programmes. There are many fine examples on bureaucratic inability to reach decisions: let me just mention the hair-raising stories (fit for television serials) on the Óbuda Shipyard and Island or the Videoton electronics and computer manufacturing firm. The picture would be dismal indeed if these well known instances were typical of real economic processes.

Reality, however, is more complex. Especially since Mihály Kupa's appointment as Finance Minister, a policy whose first consideration is the aspect of control, has often been held back even within the administration. After a provisional blockage, the ratio of cases approved and rejected by the Property Agency has hardly changed amid the political skirmishes: three-quarters of the transformations initiated by the enterprises are approved,[8] and while there was more and more talk about the risks involved in the participation of foreign capital, the sell-off of big companies, such as the Chinoin Pharmaceutical Works, or the Borsod Brewery, went through. In 1981 twice as much working

capital flowed into Hungary as into Czecho-Sklovakia or Poland. Working capital does not obey declarations of intent of governments: the process, therefore, considering the insecurity of legislative circumstances in the East European region, including Hungary, has gone on with surprising rapidity.

The contradictory character of the process is shown by the fact that, together with, and in spite of, repeatedly emphasized control considerations, the non-uniformity of conditions for foreign capital have not diminished. Suffice it to refer to the special immunity from taxation, and the support granted to the Suzuki Works, or the protective tariffs obtained by Samsung, in order to demonstrate what has been said about the relationship of fancy and reality.

The process of the change of ownership thus seems to be returning to its original channel, but this cannot be attributed to the efforts of the government. Within it, a struggle, actuated by ministerial interests as well as by ideological and power considerations, is still going on. The results can be seen in a series of decisions that contradict one another. The industrial portfolio tries from time to time to extend its scope of authority to the state firms. Earlier this had been done through industrial management holdings, recently it is expected to be effected under the aegis of the State Proprietary Joint Stock Company. Initially, in June 1991, this latter was proposed in order to prevent the interests involved in the enlargement and sale of state property from being concentrated into a single hand. Now that the same minister is responsible for both objectives, firms to be left permanently in state ownership have been loosely defined. This could in principle make it possible to "own" a number of state enterprises producing 70 per cent of the profit, going far beyond the fewer than 100 public utility firms originally earmarked to remain in the public sector. In domestic trade there is a clear effort to sell whole chains as single packages, something that from the start could create a total distortion of the market economy. In agriculture too, there is a wish to combine privatization and large agro-businesses.

On the whole, there is too much of the state, yet in practice there is not enough of it in two respects. First, the role of the authority ensuring competition in the change of ownership is formal, yet negligible in practice. This is not as it should be, since the moving force of a market economy is competition, which the state must stimulate while limiting sectional interests—a task of primary importance which the economic agents, following their own self—interests, will not voluntarily fulfil. Only the administration is both capable and qualified in ensuring fairness in competition. Secondly, as foreign capital penetrates, the sectional interest of large foreign investors is bound to achieve undue prominence. It may thus become less important that for a small country only an open import policy provides protection against the concentration of economic power. There is no one other than the executive able to secure the public interest in the country's being truly open: compared to this, the fact that the process moves faster if an entire subsector is sold to one buyer, is of minor consideration. This blunder has already been committed in the case of some of the natural monopolies.

So can it be said that the experiments and mistakes of the past four or five years have taught us anything useful? To start with, it is clear that the job can be done, and this within a reasonable period of time. If we do not insist on a book value calculated on the cost-proportionate basis usual in social costing, and if we have a genuine rate of exchange and if, finally, taxation is favourable to the investors, then it is absurd to presume that investors at home and abroad will take 80 to 100 years to buy up the overwhelming part of the economy.

Performance and dilemmas

There seems to be no reason now to suppose that the decline of the total economic output, mass unemployment, the change of direction taken by the external economy owing to the loss of established markets, the liquidation of a good number of firms—a quarter of the small enterprises among them—and the acceleration of inflation, could have been avoided under any other policy or by any other government. It is impossible to switch to a market economy just like that, since the market in today's world is an extremely complex system of coordination and information,[9] which does not come into being just because the rate of exchange is real, the budget is balanced, and the country regularly pays its debts. The factors to be taken into account, beyond the economic model, are the established economic structure, an established international role-specialization, established expectations and scale of values, as well as a radical transformation of managerial attitudes. The resultant frictional loss can be foreseen and is far from negligible.

That is why it is really not surprising that, by regional comparison, GDP declining by 3.3 per cent, in 1990 and by 8 per cent in 1991, industrial output diminishing by 8 and 19 per cent, respectively, or inflation rising from 29 per cent to "only" 35 per cent—while liquidity is maintained—are the best results in this region. Since the impossibility of the large-scale, state-owned sector performing effectively is immediate, whereas the advance of the (semi-) private sphere begins from a low level, this latter is naturally unable to prevent effects that are damaging to the total output of the previous process. The decline in macro-economic performance is expected to come to a halt by the middle of 1992: indeed, from 1993 the economy may move towards a modest recovery. The rate of growth in external market performance will slow down, though the trend of improvement is expected to continue: the bankruptcy of some major exporters engaged in transactions that have been forced upon them will raise the efficiency of the export trade. We have no reason to believe that—in the absence of any extraordinary and sudden changes—the inflow of working capital will slow down, or that the trade surplus in non–commodity items will disappear. It will remain possible for the country to be financed, for debts to be serviced, and for the credits needed to be accessible in the medium term.[10] A condition for this is naturally that budget-making policy should show greater restraint, and money should remain at least as tight as it has thus far

been. In other words, politically-motivated efforts towards accelerating growth should not be able to gain ground in the future either. Growth is the end result of the healing process, not its beginning: artificially forcing it means subjecting a patient convalescing after an operation to strenuous exercise from the start.

Why can the process of decline be expected to stop? In the first place, we can start from the fact that, towards the end of 1991, the former Soviet market's share in the Hungarian economy was already down to 12 per cent, thus whatever happens here will not crucially affect the performance of the economy. The position of the large industrial firms at the centre of the chronic problems of the 1970s and 1980s has been shaken: the very existence of many of them is already problematic even if they are not in liquidation now. This will not be a new focus of tension in 1992-94. The liberalization of imports has required a considerable modernization of production, which is demonstrated by a more than 60 per cent growth of dollar-export income for the engineering industry. Under consolidated conditions, privatizing tourism is capable of producing greater dollar incomes even at a much lower import input (although tourist income will never reach the level of Austria or Greece). The motor effect of exports and of services will grow stronger. It is difficult not to notice that alongside 930,000 industrial employees, there stood in 1991 a total of 550,000 enterprises, which are not all one-person companies. Hungary is thus no longer, either socially or economically, the "country of iron and steel", thus the cut-back of earlier inflated industries (which had poor prospects anyway), and the permanent reduction in industrial employment, are symptoms of healing rather than of crisis. The processes here indicated in outline show that what has survived of industry is now competitive on the world market, firms can sell their products much more profitably and on new markets. True, a few firms, which were merely shaken in earlier years, will be finally floored now, which makes government expectations of immediate growth unduly optimistic. This, however, does not justify permanent pessimism or speaking of an iron law of crisis.

Is the explosive growth in unemployment indicative of a crisis of the economy? My answer is a clear no. Among the South European countries similar to Hungary as regards development and position, the respective unemployment figures reported in 1991 were 15 per cent for the prospering economy of Spain, and 11.5 per cent for Italy. In these countries economic development is strengthening, while in Hungary—especially as far as industry is concerned—a considerable fallback is observed and structural transformation is taking place. Earlier market reforms had only been simulated, which is attested to by the fact that the measures taken never led to the abandonment of unprofitable activities. Thus, a favourable development is the reduction in income-consuming activities, since such have had to be maintained by others.

The point in question is not that unemployment should be welcome. What is true is that in market economies adapting themselves to external markets by transforming their economic structure—mainly during a recession—the said

degree of unemployment, or the rate of 11-12 per cent to be expected in 1992, cannot be regarded as healthy. It is a rate that can be reduced only by giving up other economic aims, such as moderation of inflation and budget redistribution and the acceleration of structural change. This fact does have unfavourable effects but does moderate wage–increases, which in Hungary are the most important immediate cause of inflation. The price of slowing down inflation is thus being paid by the 400,000 unemployed: the beneficiaries include 3.5 million pensioners and the one and a half million public servants who have seen their relative position decline owing to income-redistribution.

Is inflation going to stop? In Hungarian conditions this is probably a rash and unwarranted question. From the point of view of transition, the turning point is stopping and then reversing the acceleration of price–increases. This deceleration started in the autumn of 1991, the change of direction took place. The annual rate of inflation was 35 per cent in 1991, in December 1991 it was only 32.2 per cent compared to December 1990; in January 1992, the rise in prices was only 28.8 per cent as compared to January 1991. This latter is particularly important. Since 1979 the annual price index has always been shaped not only by expectations but also by price increases in the first days of every year.

Can we reasonably reckon with a radical change as soon as 1992? The National Bank believes that inflation will be at 15 per cent in December, the government that it will go down to 13 per cent. This forecast may well be exaggerated and seems to ignore the various insecurities attending Hungarian economic development and the ensuing frailness of the process. All economic research institutes have called attention to this.

Such a radical decline in inflation could only be expected if all the factors of economic development show the best possible outcomes, and these are accompanied by substantially balanced state finances. Today the budget is commonly described as bleeding from a hundred wounds. A more serious problem is that—in spite of earlier indications[11]—the government appears to have forgotten the deficit of Ft 100,000 million systematically built into the state's finances. There no allowance has yet been made for the fact, important in 1990-92, that recession and privatization, and even the inflow of working capital, tend to reduce revenue from taxation, while 90 per cent of the debt side derives from gratuitous allocations forced on the government by old promises as well as by automatisms. It is hardly possible to get out of this situation without a reform of social insurance[12]—production subsidies being practically absent in current budget allocations. The central exchequer subsidies, steeply rising until 1992, cannot be objected to in the absence of a reform of the major distributive systems. However, a surplus expense of almost Ft 50,000 million must thus be covered by an increase in consumer taxes.

It is clear, therefore, that a reform of state finances would be unpopular, violating many interests. Such a reform could have been carried out by a government, taking office after the first free election, only during the very first stage of its functioning, when its political capital was still intact and major

changes would not have been objected to. This was not done. For eighteen months the Ministry of Welfare was unable to make any proposals, thus the Ministry of Finance resolved to put forward, under the heading of a state budget bill, a proposition essentially limited to procedural questions, which left all substantial issues open. Seeing the serious imbalance in state finances, the Minister of Welfare thought to explain his failure to take the required measures by pointing out that his ministry had few qualified economists and that his Western advisers would consider a high degree of prudence and slow changes to be reasonable.[13]

What has been said does not yet justify the failure to even reckon with a "deliberately non-balanced" state budget (I have not mentioned either the overestimating of revenues or certain questionable solutions). Added to this is the chronic crisis in agricultural finance[14], which mirrors the impasse of earlier agrarian development as a whole. As far as can be seen, the consequences have been disregarded in the interests of maintaining the budget estimate.

All this gives rise to two concluding remarks. One is that overexpanding state expenditure has remained the critical point of Hungarian economic recovery: the revenue needed for politically determined expenditure can only be acquired through high tax rates (including social insurance contributions). Here, it is especially true that smiles are no substitute for action. If private savings are spent on making up for the deficit, this is bound to displace private investors in the first place and to drive up interest rates.[15] In this respect, with the progress of the political cycle, a change is less and less likely and a steady and important moderation of the inflationary process is here to be waited for, with single digit inflation, still a long way off. Bankruptcy legislation has similar effects. When large firms go insolvent they can—in the absence of a credit injection—drag the large commercial banks down with them.

My second observation refers to the limitations of spontaneous adaptation, which has been the motor of earlier success. Enterprise adaptation ultimately cannot disregard the general terms set by the state. The overdistributive state reduces economic activities and relegates initiative to the second economy. In this case, convalescence becomes a protracted, slow and contradictory process, which is bound to last longer and be more painful than necessary.

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Ottó Orbán

On the Death of István Vas

Vas István halálára

Last night, István Vas, being dead
fate wound up his file on the poet,
found his name in his vast A – Zed,
and wrote *cancelled* clearly below it.
The data were not much to go on,
not such as to do a man honour:
eyes: staring, jaws: wide and so on,
in other words, *this one's a goner*.

Can anything comfort or ease us?
Where's God, in our great desolation?
He vanishes as if to tease us,
like the man in K's *Funeral Oration*.
But one thing is certain: we laughed
and sat in his garden together,
leant back in our chairs, and I quaffed
his whisky and talked of the weather.

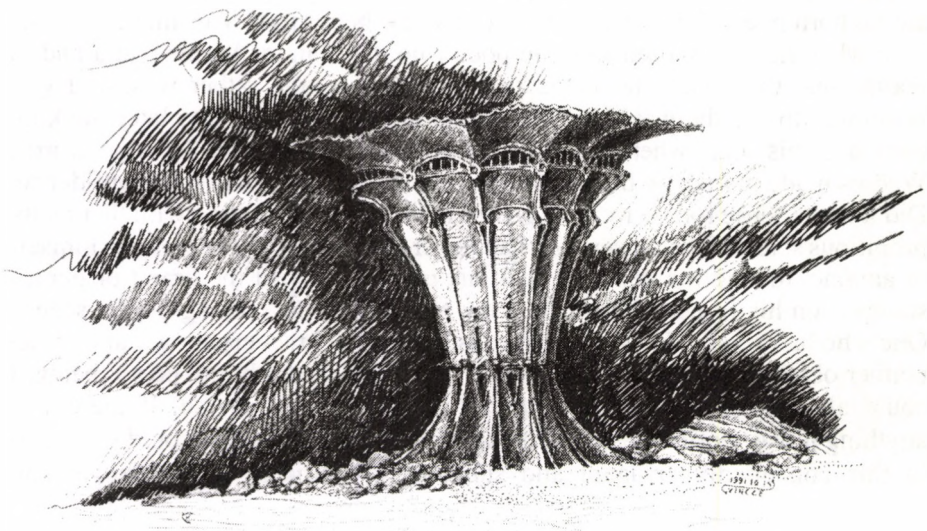
And I saw he was brave although scared,
a hero despite of his terror,
like one whom disgust had prepared
at the century's terrible mirror,
as a Jew a primitive Christian,
as a Christian a pagan–discursive;
there lurked in his soul beyond question
a gentle and courteous subversive,

one true in his heart, and effectual:
respected for wit and incision,
a naiviste intellectual,
a poetic metaphysician
who bedded the proud and the pretty,
till body was pleasured and glutted,
who courted his capital city
like a lover with beauty besotted,

the city, that bounteous sewer
of festering spirit and matter,
you, murderous country, you were
his love and his only begetter:
never mind that the road in its motion
leads nobody no place whatever,
that deluge and revolution
relieve us not here and not ever.

Stumbling through night, he rehearses
laments that he wrote for another,
who lived, as does he, in his verses,
our Pista, our father and brother:
no pills in his pockets, but merely
the torch of his poems to ease him,
to lighten his circuit so clearly
mortality may predecease him.

Translated by George Szirtes



Szabolcs Várady

István Vas: The Poet Who Created Himself

"Poeta non fit, sed nascitur", a poet is born, not made: the tag is deeply entrenched to this day. Perhaps this is one reason why magazines receive a deluge of doggerel whose authors are surprised or indignant when told that writing poetry is not merely a matter of divine aflatus but is a matter of craft as well, a craft which has to be learnt just like carpentering. Nor is it uncommon, even among practitioners of the craft, that the qualification, *poeta doctus* should conceal a degree of suspicion or scorn. Mihály Babits, who had something of the same role in Hungarian as T. S. Eliot in English letters, was often referred to by ill-wishers as Professor Babits, suggesting that he attempted to make up for his lack of native poetic force with erudition and craftsmanship, genuine feeling with speculation. For this very reason he was called an intellectual poet, as of his successors István Vas has perhaps been most frequently—and he did not account this as praise.

I do not mean to say that the opposite of the Latin saying is true, that there are no born poets. That there are, no one knew better than Vas himself. At the time when he first started to write poetry he met Sándor Weöres, and had to realize that they could never be rivals. "The question rather was, as I was beginning to see the wealth of his formal resources," he wrote later, looking back over his life, "whether I can ever become a poet at all. In other words, Weöres made my poetic being questionable after a brief period of confidence. Did it make sense for me to write poetry in the same generation with that really propitious scion of the muses who had never had to publicly apprentice himself to anyone, to find his depth or seek his means, but had the brand of genius stamped on his forehead from the very moment of his coming on the scene? One who had received free of charge, as his birthright, everything that one can neither obtain nor acquire nor deserve? He called in doubt my poetic being. I could also say he accelerated another mental process in me. If there was anything it was worth my saying it was something no one else could say—and in this conceitedly arrogant and submissively modest acknowledgement,

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Weöres's influence certainly did have a considerable part to play. It was the end of a long train of thought of which another thesis was an important premise: Anything anyone else could also say, he could say better."

Not a very promising beginning. The young poet trusted not in his gifts, even less in the circumstances, but only in that unique, individual compound that he was the formula of, which he was yet to find after a long and assiduous quest of learning and maturation. This is how he looks back on this process in a later poem: "I am not what I was born to be: / Only that is mine that I have acquired."

Whatever he had inherited was least useful for poetry. His father was an ambitious and successful Jewish businessman, a cloth merchant, who refused to listen to any talk of his son's literary aspirations. The language spoken around him was anything but literary, it was full of Germanisms, solecisms, tortured phrases and misplaced accents. The part of the town he spent his childhood in was far from poetic: dark and dull apartment houses, bad-smelling back alleys, "advertisements, night-clubs, cheap hit tunes and cinemas" on the Grand Boulevard, as he says in a later poem, when he had learnt "how to refine the base material." For the time being, however, his lot was a solitude that craved for redemption. This finally arrived, when at the age of eighteen, Lajos Kassák, the chieftain of the Hungarian avantgarde, read his poems and told him: "Sir, you are a poet." But it would be a long time before his circumstances were propitious for writing poetry. A university education was out of the question and, since he refused to follow his father's calling, he checked accounts in a factory office until he lost his post as a consequence of the anti-Jewish legislation that was being passed as Hungary slid at an accelerating rate into fascism. Around that time bare suvival became exceedingly doubtful: nor did he, amid the agonizing conditions of forced labour service, think life worth while. He attempted suicide, only to be saved by the solicitude of friends, as it was to happen again when, in the last stages of the war, he was offered shelter by a new friend, the novelist Géza Ottlik.

But let's return to the beginning. For Vas, who was trying to break away from his father's world, reading the *Communist Manifesto* brought a kind of philosophical enlightenment, a reflex of which was to seek new revolutionary departures in poetry—and to find them in Kassák's periodical *Dokumentum*, whose contributors included Gyula Illyés, who had recently returned from exile in Paris and was soon to become the leading figure in the populist literary movement (no major contemporary stayed for long in Kassák's camp). Clearly Kassák's tyrannical temperament played a part in this, but there was also something "grandiosely cantankerous" in the poetic nature as well—as Vas was to describe it in his monumental autobiographical volumes I have already quoted from and will continue to quote from, which he began at the zenith of his life but, to our great regret, was never to finish. Kassák's poetry "was not linked by a single thread to the earlier native tradition, nor was a single thread of it to go into the tapestry of the new Hungarian poetry. Apollinaire and Eliot could be continued, Kassák could not be."

Sobering up from the heady feeling of the accolade of acceptance as a poet, István Vas, still in his teens, realized in reading the Hungarian classics, especially János Arany, that as against the one-sidedness of the avantgarde, classical poetry was polyphonic and multilayered, offering fresh discoveries and a good many more opportunities to express his own personality, a personality that had assimilated such contrary influences. In addition he had come to recognize that for the time being, the prospects of socialism were bleak. In tracing the interrelationship—or to be more cautious, imagined interrelationship—between artistic form and political thinking, he attempted to summarize things as follows: "In our consciousness a sense of the offensive was associated with the avantgarde, while strict metrical forms fitted the defensive much better. And here should also be mentioned the paradox that the defensive required rational utterance much more, as though fidelity, loyalty and the awareness of approaching dangers had combined to induce us into speaking openly, as much and as long as possible." In the end he was turned against the avantgarde by a need, instinctive, then increasingly conscious, to base his work on his own personality as an individual. Thus at the age of twenty he decided to become a traditionalist poet. What he imagined was that he would be the only one. It soon became clear that he was on the same wavelength with most of his generation, which made him reconsider things. For the time, however, he was learning his craft with enjoyment, trying his hand at a very wide diversity of ancient and modern forms; these endeavours received critical appreciation when he published his first volume in 1932. It took him a few years to perceive that form, which he had learnt to use with great assurance, was preventing him from realizing his longer term goals as a poet. "What had been a languid desire had become a pressing need...: to rid myself of the whole of that classicism which had gradually become so commonplace and complacent, which I had set out in search of some eight years before with the resolve to develop it into a uniquely individual, and a very personal form."

But it is not easy to rid yourself of fully grown poetic reflexes. Nevertheless, he deliberately tried to do so. Around this time he discovered the English metaphysical poets, the poetic passion of Donne and Marvell: before long he began translating them. It was, however, a slow-working antidote, to be assimilated into his own poetry over a longer period of time. By the same token, rereading Apollinaire (around 1938), he discovered in that poet's modernity the post-Spenglerian novelty of the spirit, and particularly, of the literature of the 20th century: "the survival, continuity and coalescence of allegedly irreconcilable cultures, the gone and ongoing pasts of human history, in the simultaneity of the highest consciousness of the present." He translated "Chanson du mal–aimé" (and a few years later, jointly with Miklós Radnóti, a collection of Apollinaire): this he did in the conviction that "if I am not to squander the wealth I have found in him, I must wait for the time until I can turn it to my best advantage."

There came a change in or, rather, a broadening of, his outlook as well.

Even as he still professed himself a communist (though his cast of mind and independence of spirit made him keep a distance from the party and activism in the movement), an increasing influence of the New Testament led him to convert to Catholicism in 1938. In that same year he was dismissed from his job and in the following year he was to lose his first wife, Eti, Kassák's adopted daughter, who was a focal point of his poetry and of his private myth. Love continued to be a constant agent in his poetry, as the title of his second volume of poems, *Kettős örvény* (Double Vortex) indicated: it alludes to a long period in his life spent under the agonizing dual allegiance of two love affairs. The title harks back to Dante: the offending lovers are caught up in a ceaseless hot whirlwind in the *Comedy*. The sense of guilt, made permanent by his inability to reach a final affirmative decision, and a constant drive to self-analysis precipitated the impact that the English metaphysical poets had made on him earlier. (He found a grotesque use for the first intellectual poem he had published, as the chapter from his autobiography printed here relates: this persuaded the army psychiatrists that the madness he had feigned was genuine.)

The true change in his poetic technique was brought about by history. The awareness of the danger to his life that became permanent in the wake of the German occupation of Hungary (March 19, 1944) loosened the poetic reflexes that had become second nature to him and the classicism he had begun to feel so restrictive. Up till then, "when I had felt like writing a poem, even the day-to-day words fell naturally into classical metres, pleasing rhyme schemes, and organized themselves into regular strophes... Now, however, "the(se) verses burst forth as though a walled up, abundant well had broken free. Some kind of a more natural, more direct technique... I began to feel that even as the Germans were finally subjugating the country, they liberated the poet in me: more than that, they gave me the strength, and even the spirits, to endure the trials, and keep up, as long as possible, my poetic logbook."

It is at this point that the destiny, both as a poet and as a man, of his best friend of the period, Miklós Radnóti, parted ways. Radnóti would not accept the friendly help offered to him and refused to go into hiding. Before his death, he wrote his greatest poems in the labour camps, consummating, perfecting the lyrical classicism from which Vas had just released himself. It is difficult to dismiss the thought Vas hinted at in an interview and, indeed, later in a poem: that destiny and character necessarily converged here and that Radnóti accepted his martyrdom for the sake of writing those great works that could only have been written in the certain knowledge of his impending death. Just as we find it difficult, knowing his last poems, to imagine Radnóti as a survivor, in the same way we should feel Vas's oeuvre unfinished and incomplete if it had been broken off at that time. In him the continuity and systematic interconnections of his work is more than the sum of the individual poetic achievements. Its foundation lies in a life lived in an unrepeatable uniqueness:

> The life–sustaining, every–day ninety–six degree fever,
> The variety, uniqueness, *ultima realitas*,

What appears, disappears, and if it existed, will never again exist,
What the Lord of the Universe, even after eons, will never again create.

Ultima realitas
(Translated by William Jay Smith)

It is small wonder that István Vas, who in a very real sense owed his life to the advancing Russians, but because of his leftist leanings and interests knew the history of the Bolshevik party better than the average man, should have ended his "poetic logbook" with the wry recognition that he found himself unable to celebrate amid the rubble of liberated Budapest. In a grand Epilogue written to this cycle, he says that he hadn't gone into hiding, "dodging and deceiving", only to renounce his integrity, "not to be myself", to submit to the requirements that literature was subjected to ever more stringently as time passed. However, before the Stalinist night closed in (in 1949) and socialist realism became compulsory for all the arts in Hungary, Vas was able to travel to Italy on a fellowship. Although then and in subsequent years travel was a major source of inspiration, it was always Italy that touched him most personally. He discovered in the graceful and strict proportions of Roman culture, in the very arches and columns of Rome his own "ideal and destiny", for he was always passionately interested in the great transition from antiquity to Christianity and preferred to think of himself as a latterday Roman, converted to the new faith but still mourning the fall of Rome. "Intersection of contraries," he quotes Nicolaus Cusanus, and as he apostrophizes him, one cannot help perceiving a presentiment of the dangers awaiting the poet in the years ahead:

And the intersection of oppositions
Are you, too, who were discoverer of this,
You, Cusanus, cardinal and heretic,
Worldly seeker after God, who was the last
Scholastic and first revolutionary,
Great conciliator between religion
And science, of dogma and mysticism,
Who preserved the traditional yet kindled
The new. How did you escape burning alive
At the stake, how stay excommunication?
Under suspicion by Rome, how could you live?

The Grave of Nicolaus Cusanus
(Translated by Daniel Hoffman)

Life under suspicion by Rome wasn't easy at all. The years of silence came or, more precisely, the years of enforced silence. The best Hungarian poets were writing for their desk drawers, and, some of their poems—certainly in the case of Vas—were dangerous to keep even there. He hid his poems in a crevice

under the windowsill, one of them, *Az eretnek vallomása* (Confessions of a Heretic, see p.26) was not published until 1989.

There was, however, an indirect way to poetic expression—translation. Although the best of contemporary Western literature was inaccessible to Hungarian readers, the classics were being published in new translations. The majority of the silenced writers tried to eke out a living doing translations. Luckily, they had a knowledge of foreign languages and there was also a long and continuing tradition for Hungarian poets to engage in such work. I have mentioned some of Vas's earlier undertakings, made in response to a personal need. Now he was able to act something of himself in the garbs of Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, and Thackeray. Faithful to the originals, but with a personal feeling and intensity. Even if in disguise and indirectly, he was able to speak. He expressed his thanks in *A fordító köszönete*:

> I render thanks to you, you gracious giants,
> That although silenced I still wagged my tongue,
> That my voice spoke through your voice in defiance,
> In Molière's epigram and Shakespeare's song,
> In Goethe, Schiller: that I did not fill
> My throat with pompous, lying hymns of praise,
> But hid my thought in scattered several
> Secret fragments, in foreign poems and plays.
>
> *The Translator's Vote of Thanks*
> *(Translated by George Szirtes)*

Vas wrote masterful afterwords to his translations. From the beginning he had written essays and criticism: when these pieces were finally collected and published in 1958, it became evident that he was among the best of his generation in this form as well. In the years when the party exercised its strictest control over intellectual life, he found ways and means to express his own thoughts in his own language, never passing over in silence those details which the translation in hand had aroused personal interest in him, the silenced poet. Thus on Schiller in *The Translator's Vote of Thanks*:

> By being faithful to an ancient text
> The new discovered ways that suited well
> It was the world I saw that wrought and vexed
> The peasant's speeches out of *William Tell.*
> One I translated out of my own hate,
> And I found the same gorge, seeing on display
> The emperor's hat his intermediate,
> In various shapes, had staked across our way.
>
> *The Translator's Vote of Thanks*

And this is how he ended his essay on *William Tell* (in 1952!): "Presumably, it speaks to us more immediately than to the generations that have gone before us, because the subject—a small nation's struggle for independence against foreign oppressors—is perhaps closer to us, and more timely, than it was at the time of the writing of the play."

When this fight for independence finally broke out in Hungary in 1956, it meant to Vas not only liberation but something more, and more enduring, too, something that remained relevant even after the suppression—absolution.

> The city has purchased herself and redeemed me as well:
> My guilt floats in gutters and ditches, in winter's apparel.
> The great absolution is here, in the present.
>
> *Pest Elegy*
> *(Translated by George Szirtes)*

Absolution: that was to have been the title of the concluding part of a large autobiographical "novel", the volume dealing with the years from 1945 to 1956. Absolution—but of what? One can only guess, partly on the basis of a poem, "Az új Tamás" (The New Thomas, see p.28, written on November 1st, 1956, a few days before the Hungarian revolution was crushed, but published only in 1989), and partly on the basis of some other poems and a few allusions in the autobiography. We can set out on two trails. One is the poet's relationship to Hungary, or national identity, to put in the contemporary phrase, the other is love, or more narrowly, the sense of guilt connected to love. Though his patriotic attachment was also bound up with love. This is what he says later about "Szeptemberi vallomás" (September Confession), written in 1938: "It represented an unusual species of patriotic verse: 'Will your arm spurn me, or will it caress and embrace me?/ An exile, still your son I will continue to be', I wrote, as though I wanted to profess my love, quickly, breathlessly, as long as it was possible, morally as well as in practical ways." It was really until after writing this poem that he realized that, "hidden behind the obvious confession of love expressed in words, there was another (though related to what was openly confessed), a confession, wordless (more precisely, disguised in the words of the unfeigned confession)—addressed to a woman. To Eti? I wouldn't have had to hide it then, hide it to myself either—for then the confession would not have been so craving, so 'hopeless'... No, the confession was addressed to Eti's mother. And to Eti, of course. To both of them, to the unity between them, to their species, in the biological and morphological sense of the word."

Under the pressures of history, his attachment to his native country had to go through a process of spiritualization. "Hungary, my love of the imagination," he says in the poem "Menekülő Múzsa" (Muse On the Run), alluding to a country taking refuge in her literature and history. Within a year Eti's mother died, followed by Eti. A few years later the poet's mother, with other Jews, was herded through the streets of Budapest by Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes.

István Vas still professed himself to be a Hungarian, but now it was a life sentence much rather than a love affair.

At this time love is already the double vortex I referred to above. It goes not only with a sense of guilt but is intertwined in Vas's mind and private mythology with the actual horrors of history. "For if I was unable to control my own fateful volcano, what right do I have to look upon what is happening all around me as a strange hell? Clearly, the world of the instincts is one whole, just as that of sin, Adam's inheritance, to which Cain's contributed in direct lineage. Soon I was seized by the feeling—no, awareness—that, what we did and felt in Visegrádi utca contributed to all that was going on in the external world. I recorded this state of mind, obsession, if you like, on two evenings in three stanzas, which I didn't intend to read as a squib but as bona fide confessional verse. I entitled it 'Gyilkosok' (Murderers)." This motif cropped up again after '45. In 'Összefoglalás' (Summing Up), a rhapsody, he lives through and judges every iniquity and horror of the period as though they had taken place in himself: and in 'Ősi aljasság' (Primordial Wickedness) he professes a community with the new tyranny: "I have been undone by love, you by the greed for power."

Love and country: the two traditional feelings that have dominated Hungarian poetry, now filled with bitterness and a sense of guilt that craved for redemption. That redemption was brought to him by the revolution of '56, the delighted sense of identity with the lot of his country, and in particular, with that of his native city, Budapest. The stanza quoted above of *Pest Elegy* continues:

... and I can feel hell
Slip from my heart with the sorrow that's stamped and suffered alone:
Redeeming herself, the city redeems me as one of her own.
Forgiveness, unhoped for, glows from the body, from bruised flesh and bone.

Here would have ended *Nehéz szerelem* (Difficult Love), subtitled *A líra regénye* (The Novel of Lyric Poetry), gathering many threads and motifs of his life and poetry. However, his oeuvre did not end there: on the contrary, it is after this point, during the sixties, that its real and final grand consummation began.

István Vas's first volume of poetry, as we have seen, attracted attention by its defiant conservatism. The emphasis later increasingly shifted to a personal message, one to which he had yet to find adequately personalized means. But by that time in the West, and in its wake, in Hungary, the idea of objective poetry had gained ground, with personal utterance becoming seen as a synonym of conservatism. Vas took up the challenge, and his answer was to make his voice and verse even more personal: by dint of that he was becoming an ever greater—and ever more modern—poet, even anticipating some of the most recent trends in world poetry. George Szirtes writes in his preface to Vas's selected poems (*Through the Smoke,* Corvina, 1989): "In the late eighties of the

twentieth century we may notice a more discursive, more autobiographical, almost a more epic quality in the poetry of the English language. In Walcott, in Murray, in Dunn (and, if we stretch a point, in Brodsky) we have become accustomed to the play of the intellect, to a preoccupation with place and past, and importantly a desire to synthesize individual experience with broadly European culture. Let me also mention Lowell, whom Vas once referred to, speaking of his youthful search for a way: 'And how much I could have learnt from Lowell if only I could have then read the poetry which he was only to write thirty years afterwards.' "

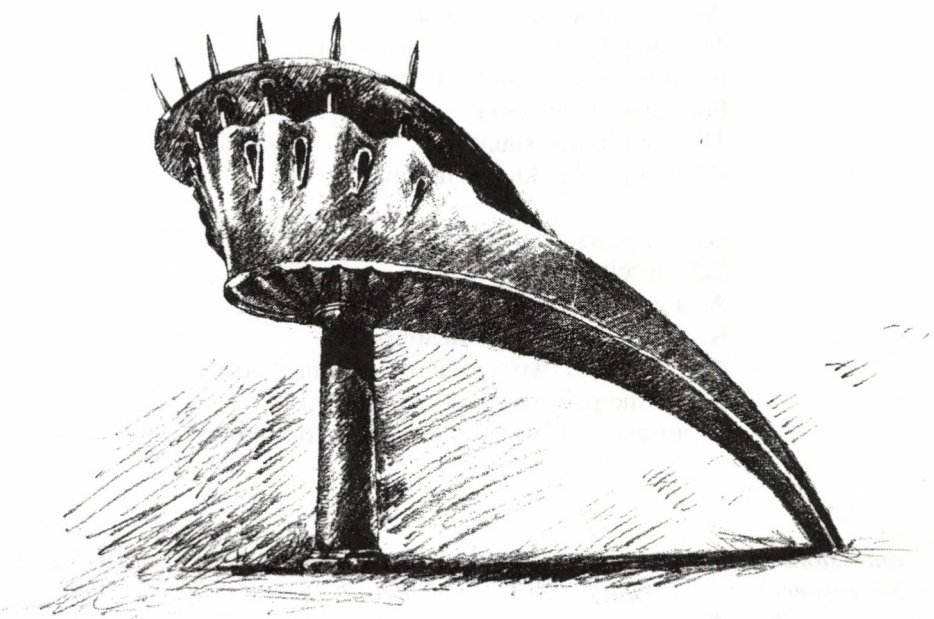
Vas the translator continued to provide active and fruitful support to Vas the lyric poet all through the sixties. At long last the gates were opened to twentieth century western poetry, if not all, at least a good deal of it. As a reader for Európa Publishers, he had a share in this: it was he who started and then edited the series "Contemporary Poetry". His translations of Eliot and Cavafy are his best achievement of this period. His free verse of Latin severity and an easy elegance continues to develop: he created such peaks as "Boccherini sírja" (Boccherini's Grave), which, as the younger poet, Dezső Tandori, says, "shows Vas's mature art at its best and purest: the almost commonplace everyday tone and that pathos which, dressed in everyday language, acquires a surplus tension and conveys anything but a sculpturesque posture—rather the deep emotion felt at the contemplation of existence."

The sixties brought him official recognition. In 1962 he was awarded the most prestigious of prizes, that named after Lajos Kossuth. He was incredibly prolific all through this decade. He wrote criticism, essays, pamphlets, and translated Nelly Sachs, Saint-John Perse, Achibald McLeish, in addition to Eliot and Cavafy. He had always felt an attraction to the theatre and was an outstanding translator of plays. He rendered into Hungarian Ben Jonson, Webster, Ford and several 20th century plays. In addition, he co-authored three theatrical productions, among them the "musical tragedy" *Egy szerelem három éjszakája* (Three Nights of a Love Affair), a tribute to the memory of his friend Miklós Radnóti, which has been a long-running success on Hungarian stages ever since.

It was also in the sixties that he began his ambitious autobiography. (In fact, he had already made a start to it back in 1942). He intended to employ a concentric design, writing about the same subjects from the several points of view of his background and environment, money, faith, politics, art and, last but not least, love. The first part, *Elvesztett otthonok* (Lost Homes), was finished but could only appear in print in 1957. Now he began the novel of poetry, but the dimensions outgrew the frame, and although the main theme was poetry, other themes were intermingled in it. Although he was only able to trace his life and poetry until 1945, over two and a half thousand exciting, fascinating, highly polyphonic pages of—what? Analysis, interpretation, investigation, commentary, which ultimately round out into a kind of novel. It is the novel of a life and an oeuvre, and a recapturing of them at the same time. As prose it is masterful, spontaneous and sophisticated, lively, easy and precise—

a very special sort of semi-fiction, which is also a rich mural of the literary life of a whole preiod—a unique tour de force.

While his prose took account of the past, his poetry faces the ineluctable future. Such a facing up to death contains, of course, stock–taking of the past in general, and especially so in István Vas, for a distinctive feature of his poetry, to use an apposite phrase once applied to him, is its "permanent presence", affairs in the past in the present of the poet's self. For the self, for Vas is none other than that something, that surplus, which each of us acquires and adds onto the inherited basic layer that is largely the same in all of us, and which each of us acquires especially in true human relationships: we also assimilate all the other things we need from history and art, making them our own personal assets. This is how that uniqueness comes about (see his poem "Sem ez, sem az" [Neither This Nor That]), which unavoidably differs from everybody else's uniqueness, but which we must not give up, not even in the face of death, nor even before God. Because this "superimposition" means for István Vas understanding and intellectual acquisition, he somehow manages to assimilate death into the organic whole of his own uniqueness, as the ultimate satisfaction of the inquiring mind's curiosity. This is how death becomes among his poetry's motifs a height to be conquered, "a secret north-west passage"—something that has a personal meaning. This is why the poetry of István Vas in his old age is characterized not by resignation and defeat but rather advance, pressing forward. Courageous and encouraging poetry.



István Vas

Poems

Confessions of a Heretic

Az eretnek vallomása

Some fifteen years ago I found myself in church.
Harmonies long forgotten made lament.
A psalm leaped from the prayerbook before me:
"Who plunders you shall be the plundered,
Who preys upon you shall fall prey."
And the cell-plates of my brain
Played back again
What Marx, Engels and Lenin meant
And what the seminary into my mind had pressed:
"Die Expropriateure werden expropriiert"
—The exploiters shall be dispossessed.

I still remember that wild torrential roar
Of the secret booming in my mind,
Who are these priests, what kind,
That they keep answering one another
For millennia? It took fifteen years in it
For me to understand
The tumultuous sound
Of revenge that knows no limit.

Fifteen years of procrastination,
Self-deceit, delusion.
As a patient dreads the surgeon's
Knife, I feared my realizations.
And as a road twists on a precipitous wood
So did the pain-wrought writhing
Of unsuspected correspondences work around

"Confessions of a Heretic" and "The New Thomas" were written in 1948 and 1956, respectively, but could only be published in 1989 for obvious political reasons. —The Editor.

The naked argument from which my mind
Recoiled and still protected the irredeemable
For fifteen years.

Still there were paths enough to wander
And see the past shaping the future,
And how a deep conduit from the Old Testament runs
To machine-gun revolutions.
I still could think that what we dare believe in
Is *Good News* again, and history's the leaven
Of mankind that sank into redemption
As in a tepid puddle.

I still believed that if the world's a mere
Hazy dream, a light wave, vapour
Or energy, I cannot leave it as I found it here.
And who could be reconciled
That it was ever so
And in history there is a chain-rule too,
And believed that being clever as the serpent is as true
Of us as of the apostles.

So was I by *some other time, some other place* deceived.
Thus from revolt were fetters forged,
And what was left out
Of religion for five thousand years then made
Matter glow in aid
Of oppression and the wrath
Of the enslaved that seemed
To us as liberty and faith.

The age of modern magic's dispensation
Was upon us: not Nature, but production
was sublimated into a monster God.
As when of old it worshipped sun, thunder, river,
So human clay would flatter
Society
Into divinity.

Untried words, into the future flung,
Now noose-like around our necks are hung!
Words bulge, engorged with blood,
People, nation, class, community—all mad
Creations of our own. A monstrous whale,

The State, devours our life.
Those who rebel
Become enslaved as well,
And victors in the strife
Rush to learn, from the defeated, evil.
Our evil words poisoned the earth:
No matter who kills whom, they but increase
The martyrs of the Devil.

1948

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

The New Thomas

Az új Tamás

1

Among the twelve apostles there was one
Thomas, whom they called the Twin,
And when Jesus said, "Where I am
There you may be also—and the way you know."
He replied: "Lord, we know not where you go,
How can we know the way?"
And Jesus said to Thomas, the wretched Twin:
"I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life."

And later, after he had risen,
When the disciples saw the Lord again,
Poor Thomas was not among them,
He had heard only of the resurrection of the body.
And they said to him: "We have seen the Lord."
And he replied: "Unless I see with my own eyes
The print of the nails in his hands
And thrust my hand into his bleeding side,
Unless I touch him and my hand
Explores his seven wounds,
I will not believe, I will not believe."

And eight days later, when all the twelve sat down together,
And Thomas, the Twin, the Doubting Thomas, was with them,
Through the closed doors, Jesus came
And said to them, "Peace be with you."

Then he said to Thomas: "Put your finger here,
Put your hand here and thrust it into my side.
You may see the print of the nails with your own eyes,
I have brought you my hands, put out your hand.
Let your avid hand reach deep into my seven wounds,
And be not faithless, but believing."

And Thomas answered him: "You have appeared to me now,
You are my Lord and my God."

"Because you have seen me, you have believed,
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe,"

Jesus said to Thomas.

2

But I, the new Thomas, say: Blessed are those who see.

And blessed am I that I can see
And can say: You have truly risen,
You have risen, my country, from your tomb;
I have seen your seven wounds with my own two eyes,
And with the print of the iron nails on your hands,
You came through the closed doors.
You have risen from among the worms
And have rolled back the stone from the sepulchre,
And the spirit of Pentecost has descended upon us
And meaningless words have gained meaning.

For I was the Twin, the Doubter,
I believed you did not exist save in the imagination,
And it is only by thrusting my disbelieving finger into
your wound
That I can see the resurrected body for what it is,
And I cannot speak but can only stammer:
I am Hungarian.

I am grateful to you that before your holy wound
The tower of my life has come tumbling down,
And my happy shame floods over me
And all my doubt, borne through suffering
And sustained by passionate intellect,
Is null and void, null and void.

All Souls' Day. Foreign troops come pouring in
Across the frontieri,
The conquerors and the killers now are here—
I am Hungarian.
And I am no longer the Twin, the Double, but One
With a certainty that makes the heart pound.
And the meaningless words, long misunderstood,
have gained meaning:
You are the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

All Souls' Day, 1956

Translated by William Jay Smith

Ultima Realitas

I know, I know that you too are a bit ashamed
That I do not write like today's bards.
Indeed, I am at times somewhat ashamed myself
To speak always of our everyday life
In such a very ordinary way.
And not of the apocalypse, of heaven and of hell,
Yes, I do not deny that, reading these bards, I am envious
Of all that is packed into their stanzas—the wreaths
That with linguistic magic they barbarically pile up.
The underworld, the Hades of antiquity, the modern galaxy,
The totality of all the myths as well as the exploding atoms—
I admit I hardly ever think of all these things.
And if they crowd into my mind, I quickly cast
Them all aside, knowing that I shall before too long
Have time for them, and knowing that all this buries
One forever: Hades, the island of the dead, the boring
Monster world, and in vain they paint it all freshly for me.
It is the same old Grand Guignol that I found boring in advance:
That hair-raising, monumental junk—the soul beyond existence
Or transcendence—these things nauseate my soul, sicken it,
and make it yawn.
Left-over myths heated up over fresh steam. I do understand it,
I have experienced it when the tally of phantom facts
Struck my heart and brain, the screeching certainty
That somehow, somewhere the black water sweeps seven times
around

And the bleak landscape of barren Sheol gapes.
There were times when the infernal lava also bubbled up in me,
And in a rain-swept nocturnal garden I was the flute-player of
Thanatos,
And when the flickering conception of the universe, modern physics,
Merged with the swirling landscapes of prehistoric ages,
When matter, the solid mass towering over doubt,
Pulsated with wildly circling electric charges,
Which constitute the uncertainty principle of particles,
When what appeared solid was mere coincidence,
And when one seemed to touch facts, certainty,
And found they were mere formulas, the intersection of cosmic lines,
And when cause and effect, bold research, had been engulfed.
By midnight, the devils' garden, which had existed forever.
But it is all the same to me whether original egg or exploding atom,
Whether I am bored among ancient or modern mythologies.
For I don't give a damn about anything that is unalterable, permanent,
The eternity into which I shall submerge and dissolve.
I do not care about non-existent existence, that age-old, dark idol—
For me the miracle is what flung me up here, in transient light.
A miracle is only what is passing, what is here but for a moment,
What was not and will not be but while it still exists, is changing
constantly,
The life-sustaining, every-day ninety-six degree fever,
The variety, uniqueness, the *ultima realitas*,
What appears, disappears, and if it existed, will never again exist,
What the Lord of the Universe, even after eons, will never again create.

Translated by William Jay Smith

Secret

Titok

Why, listening to London's sounds,
Does this one thought insistently recur—
In all, our numbers total scarcely more
Than a headcount of the dwellers in this town.

In the nation's capital one feels the pull
Of ties that tug him toward five continents.
As a guest, I'm treated well. Content,
I could relax, as in a spa's warm pool.

But what can all these people know of me?
If they were angels, even, how to them
Would our strange, unrelated tongue make sense,

And could they peer deep in our hearts to see
Our secret? Here, my life's significance
Is this: Hungarian is what I am.

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Privilege

Előjog

Possibly
This side of Omega
Or, as they used to say, beyond the seven seas,
Or—why should there not be
A modern canon here?—Beyond our galaxies
There is some kind of life apart from ours,
A community
Perfected for either vermin or a superior race,
And on some Supersaturn there may be
A more advanced device that through the time
Of light-years can process the progression we emit
Of numbers, intelligible and prime
—If you can, believe it—

But our privilege remains, the earthly
Enigma, which we and only we
Can comprehend: we, who would take
A turn at torturing a God, put Deity
To death and roll a rock to hide the tomb
Of Him
Who always dies
And again for our sake
Will arise
From the dead here every Easter.

Translated by Daniel Hoffman

Neither This Nor That

Sem ez, sem az

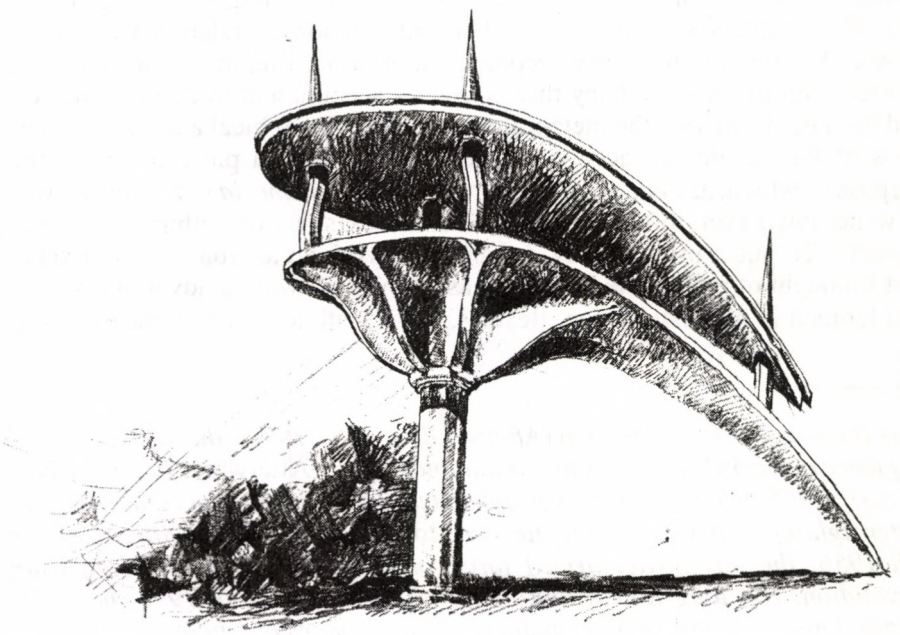
Why must I differ, always on my own,
Whether in anguish or carelessly in play?
Love, which should have carried me away,
Has cast me on this island, all alone.

Neither this nor that. So must I say
That having to be different I am prone
To go on constantly, weighed down like stone,
Or by some miracle will I one day

Be finally projected through the air?
Whatever it may cost, let it be done
And let me reach that upper atmosphere

And be delivered, differing with none—
But ever in complete agreement there—
To that Supreme One Being, this poor One.

Translated by William Jay Smith



István Vas

What Turned Out Well

A chapter from an autobiography

Then it was autumn once again. The season of putting things in order, of tidying up, as I have remarked several times in the course of this apparently interminate story. Apparently interminate, though its outlet has been marked out for a long time—the evening of a specific day, though it is more than doubtful whether I shall ever manage to reach it.

That autumn there were plenty of opportunities for putting things in order, for tidying up, just as there had been during that other autumn twelve years earlier when, after our storm-tossed outing, rowing home from the little island unmarked on the Danube chart, having definitively broken off with Judit and the freedom of emotions, sobered and disenchanted, yet glad at heart, I went back to Eti.

Autumn came bringing heavy rains. In the previous volume, I have related how the pale green delicacy of Angyalföld surprised me. Yet the most characteristic season of this quarter is not spring but autumn, smoke-drenched fog, the blackness of ominous drifts of clouds, the unrelenting downpour of November. Yes, Angyalföld in the autumn does not encourage softening of any kind. Firmly and inexorably, it demands a confrontation, a rendering of accounts.

And that autumn, the thirty-second autumn of my life, there was nothing I wanted with more immediacy than to render account and to confront myself and my fate. I satisfied the meteorological and topographical and inner conditions of this settling of accounts by embarking upon a piece of prose, the purpose of which, as I had set down by way of a *pro memoria* in the spring, was to write down everything "that I noted and took stock of within and around myself". To put it more plainly, I wanted to write an autobiography. Except that I thought of it from the beginning as a novel—it was "a novel of my life" that loomed in my imagination. Besides, I was loath to set down the events of

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This is Chapter 14 from Azután *(Afterwards, 2 vols., 1990), the last completed sequence of István Vas' s voluminous autobiography.* Afterwards *follows events to early 1945, when Soviet troops occupied Budapest after several weeks of bitter fighting. Vas' s stated intention was to close his memoirs with November 4th 1956, the day Soviet armed forces attacked to crush the Hungarian Revolution. His long illness and death on December 16th 1991, however, allowed him to complete only another 100 or so pages of typescript.— Editor*

my life linearly, one after the other. I was racking my brains for some kind of formal device, something I had never needed to do for my poems, to stave off the boredom of the having to stay put in one place writing prose. What I came up with was to compose the novel of my life concentrically: telling the same story over and over again but from the aspect of various subjects. The first would be the scene, the setting, the second money, making a living, work, the third belief, socialism and Christianity (for, in my case, the two spring from the same source), the fourth would be politics, that is history, the fifth the arts, that is literature, and the sixth would be love. Of course it would all be related in the first person singular, but the principal character of the novel would be Eti, not myself. For the object of this novel would not simply have been a rendering of accounts. I wanted at least as much to erect a monument of sorts, a token of remembrance—for Eti. This novel of my life would have ended with Eti's death. All that had happened up to that moment had, I felt, grown cold, enough at least for me to be able to take stock of it and give it form or, rather, forms. All that I had lived through since that, those three years, I considered, with all its intention—or illusion—of finality, as an unsurveyable transition, a shapeless provisionality—and in no way as the continuation of the novel.

I began by describing the scenes of my childhood. I progressed at an even pace, which would not have been possible if this new genre, the kind of writing I had committed myself to experiment with, had not fired my curiosity and imagination. However, for formal vigilance and excitement, a life of tranquillity was necessary, and time, constant and continuous time. That autumn we saw few films and little company, spent almost every night at home—for by this time the room with the balcony and a view on Pozsonyi út had become home to me, for my work and for love. There was no sign of conflict or tension between the two, in fact love seemed to be a complement, a continuation of my work. In *Lost Homes*—this was the title I gave to the first volume—I had got beyond the surroundings of my childhood and adolescence and had reached the point where Eti enters the story. She seemed to peep out from between the pages of my manuscript to lay her approving, acquiescing eyes on Mari, whom I was more and more coming to consider her substitute, her successor. The formal world and pace of our love was beginning to resemble that exalted ecstasy with which our love had once been lived in Eti's rooms.

In the meanwhile, I had not the slightest intention of giving up Piroska. As if nothing had happened, I sometimes visited her in Visegrádi utca, where we no longer had to fear that Monori would turn up unexpectedly—it was, after all, doubtful whether he would return from Russia at all. On Saturdays, as we had always done once, we had lunch together in the Kárpátia or the Elysée coffeehouse behind the statue of Lajos Kossuth—now the Sofia restaurant stands there. Piroska—as I have indicated earlier, was the great luxury of my emotional life—no, the epithet is superfluous—of my life, then. But now I could not exist without this luxury. I could not have lived without what had become of fundamental necessity to me: love, true love, the elementary kind, and work—not official work in the factory, but my own work. Yet it is true that if I had not

been granted this luxury in addition as it were, after the total satisfaction of my primary needs, I would not have sought it—for what purpose would it have served? A supplementary—or, to use a more modern term—a complementary interdependence came into being between the force-fields of Pozsonyi út and Visegrádi utca, the mechanism of which I cannot pretend to grasp even today, at a distance of forty-five years. And then—at that time—I took care not to concern myself with the mechanism of this interdependence, ignored it with careless indolence.

Yet I did know even then that this indolence was coupled with a streak of selfishness—especially in relation to Piroska. Because if our relationship was an extravagant luxury for me, what did it mean to her? Was it an extravagance for her too? An addition to what? I knew that no one had replaced Monori in her life. Was she deprived then, she with her passionate temperament? If I were a disinterested friend, the very thought would have spoiled the joy of being in her company. But I did not think of it. We spoke of so many things, but I never questioned her about how she felt otherwise. And if sometimes, very seldom, I thought of that part of her life, I always found a way to reassure myself. After all, hadn't I made clear my good intentions, not so very long ago? But it had become evident that fate or nature stands in the way of fulfilment. If at times I was on the point of condemning myself for my selfishness, a counterargument came to mind at once: is it not proof of my disinterestedness that I do not wish to secure Piroska for myself, indeed, I sincerely hope she will find a lover or a husband more manly than me and more acceptable than Monori? All this, naturally, in the firm belief that no love or marriage could alter our friendship.

Where Mari was concerned, I did not even feel selfish. That in the summer, during that trip to Veszprém, I had set out on another amorous adventure of my own? To be quite frank, I did not attach undue importance to my intention, all the more as I had not managed to realize it—if it really had been an intention at all—and this failure proved my fidelity, my commitment to Mari more effectively than if I had never set out in search of adventure. As to my relationship with Piroska—if I remember right, I have already declared that it was my firm belief that I had every right to this friendship, that it did not wrong Marika in any way, did not take from her anything she could benefit by. Yet when I was with her, I felt ill at ease. Simply because I could not be wholly certain how much of my impetuous declaration—made in the beginning of autumn, during which she had fallen into a faint that was succeeded by a lapse of memory—had penetrated her consciousness. The insistence with which I had announced that I could not and would not renounce Piroska's friendship—had she been aware of it? Nothing seemed to point that way: she never uttered Piroska's name and, if I mentioned, casually but deliberately, that she had said this or that, had painted such and such a picture, she let it pass without comment. On the other hand, however, her subsequent silence seemed to imply that she did not even wish to allude to the subject. As we progressed into autumn, my position became more and more uncomfortable. Christmas weighed heavy on my mind—what should I do? I could not imagine leaving Mari alone even for

a couple of hours at Christmas, indeed I did not want to leave her. Yet it would be unimaginable not to visit Piroska during Christmas and at New Year.

It soon turned out that I need not have worried about it in advance. It seemed that life—no, that is not the fitting word here—history—but that is much too lofty a notion in this case—let us say that the moment of inertia of our drifting towards fascism, would incidentally and effectively solve the problem of my Christmas and New Year plans. Towards the middle of November a decree was passed to the effect that those holding certificates of baptism would count as Jews from a military point of view and were therefore under the obligation to serve in forced labour units. I indicated earlier that this was to be expected, for they would not permanently tolerate that anyone in this situation should evade military service by not being trustworthy enough and evade forced labour service by not counting as a Jew. This time we did not get personal call-ups, posters proclaimed which class was to enlist—sometime in December, so we had time enough to prepare ourselves.

This time I did not answer the summons in anguish or in anger, but in a numb indifference. Looking back and trying to analyse it, this apathy could be resolved into several components. Above all there was the certainty that I had to die. For everybody said that there would to be no nonsense and no mistake, we would all be taken to Russia. And I knew I would have neither the strength nor the resourcefulness needed to stay alive. Nor sufficient willpower. In the last weeks I awoke to the realization that I was living a double life in my loves, differing as to their nature but equally consuming of time and emotion. It was obviously due to my realizing this that the tension and stress caused by being called up was deadened by the dull stupor of a "come what may" in the depths of my fear. I think it is probably an after-effect of this dull stupor that I can scarcely recall the first days after joining up—most likely by then I was registering where I was and what was happening to me with dulled senses. This much is certain: I presented myself on Vilma királynő út, which was where the battalion headquarters were. As to how we got to the station—which, I do not know—how we travelled to Vác and where we were quartered there, I do not remember—perhaps I did not pay attention to those details even then. How many days did we spend at Vác? Probably a whole week. We were not given yellow arm-bands, though these had been distributed in Miklós's (i.e., Miklós Radnóti's. Ed.) company at the beginning of summer. Indeed, at Vác, while I was there, they did not even get round to dividing us up into companies, though everyone's particulars were conscientiously taken. Some days later a sergeant appeared at our quarters, called off the names of a good number of us, then issued the order that the next day after breakfast we were to line up in marching order in front of the barracks.

In the morning our small group was marched to the station where quite a crowd had collected from the various barracks—more than enough for a company. On the train to Budapest we tried to work out how our labour service detachment had been selected. It soon became clear that the majority were

Christians, irrespective of whether they had certificates or not. The minority were those who had reported sick and were being sent for medical check–ups. In Budapest we marched to Szent Domonkos utca (today Cházár András utca) to the Jewish secondary school—today a *gimnázium* attached to the University of Budapest which bears Miklós Radnóti's name. Then, however, it was not being used for educational purposes: a battalion headquarters had been located there and it was from there that the military and labour service units were sent off to the Russian front. The headquarters and the soldiers were installed on the ground floor and the first floor. We were herded into the basement, which, extensive as it was, already seemed full to overflowing. But no, an area had been reserved for our group in a corner of the basement where, though there was not what you might call abundant space for each of us, we were not as overcrowded as we had been in the drill-hall of Gödöllő, and there was even enough straw to go round for bedding for everyone. An even more important difference was that in the basement at Szent Domonkos utca they had not turned off the central heating which, though operating extremely economically, as elsewhere throughout the city, did provide enough heat for us not to have to shiver with cold even with a roof over our heads, as we had done at Gödöllő.

These small signs seemed to confirm the rumours then sweeping Budapest, that Vilmos Nagybaczoni Nagy—who had taken the pro-German Károly Bartha's place as Minister of Defence at the end of September—was an honest and honourable man who was deeply concerned about the fate and welfare of those pressed into labour service. In fact, in the memoirs he published after the war, he said that, "I put an end to treating forced labour men as prisoners. I commanded that they be adequately fed. The desired work performance must not be forced out of starving human wrecks. I commanded that the sick and the unfit should be discharged immediately. I proscribed ill–usage and corporal punishment. I initiated rigorous investigations and imposed severe penalties upon those who treated the members of forced labour companies brutally, if they abused, beat, thrashed or blackmailed them." He went on to say that his improvements came to nought because of the implacable anti-Semitism of his staff in the ministry, the general staff and the majority of the officer corps.

This observation of Nagybaczoni's would hardly have been corroborated by the forced labour division of the replacement centre at Szent Domonkos utca. We could in no way think that we were being treated as prisoners. We could not, of course, leave the barracks but then neither could the soldiers. But there was no special guard to watch over us as there had been at Gödöllő. Altogether we had a lot less to do with the battalion staff. Sergeant Kulacsos—he outranked the others in charge of us and whom we got to know more closely than the others—led us out in the mornings to drill. While we went through it, the expressions he used were never more brusque or coarse-grained than barrack-room language in general. I even had the feeling that he spoke more reservedly to us than he did to common soldiers. It was said of him that he was a trade unionist and uncommonly humane. His comrades and subordinates did not treat us roughly either—for example, I did not hear the word Jew from the

staff once while we were at Szent Domonkos utca, a word that had been constantly thrown in our faces at Gödöllő—true, mostly by the officers—and it can be imagined with what kind of emphasis. But, as I have said, we did not have much to do with the staff or, rather, they did not concern themselves with us: they marched us to breakfast, dinner and supper, though the generally meagre supper was usually issued together with dinner. If we did not make too much noise down below, they hardly ever looked our way, allowing us to lie—or, to use a more precise word, to languish—on our straw all day. Altogether, there was something temporary about our being there. We knew what was lying in wait for us: we would be allotted to companies and sent off to Russia. And that was what we were waiting for—though waiting is not the right term either.

Two days later, just to rid myself of my languor, I set off on a walk round the basement with the thought that I might come upon someone I knew. But I found only one acquaintance: Mihály András Rónai. Of course, we were glad to see each other. It is good to have someone to talk to when you are bored. He came round with me on my expedition and if it had not been for him I would probably never have discovered that almost completely enclosed, circular area where—a first glance showed—the aristocracy of our barracks had ensconced themselves. A seclusion made possible by the fact that those who did not know of the gap in the circular wall could not divine that there was yet another small room concealed behind it. This circular room accommodated no more than ten or twelve people—they had plenty of space and plenty of straw. How they had contrived to keep this noble seclusion respected not only by their companions but also by the guards I never learned—true, I did not try to find out. The moment I walked in I recognized Lajos Básti, whom I had seen only once, and then only on stage, noted his spectacular good looks, heard his deep-toned ringing voice. Now Mityu Rónai introduced us. It turned out that there was one other actor among the privileged, Alapi.* He recognized me, hurried over—we hugged each other tempestuously. From then on he came out every day to my commoner's pile of straw to bring me solace, except when he got leave—for the members of the detachment were sometimes granted that privilege—how and from whom I knew better than to pry into. On other occasions he dragged me into their "private box" for a chat. And one night he came to fetch me with a torch and a very mysterious expression on his face, a finger to his lips to signal that I should follow him as inconspicuously as possible into their "mess", where a party was in progress.

* *This is a pseudonym used by Vas for György Aczél, the man who later became the number two man in the Kádár regime and responsible for its cultural policies. Though retired, he was still alive when the book was published in 1990.–The Editor.*

They had got hold of a couple of bottles of palinka from God knows where and were making merry on the back of them. A small flask of Polish Kontushovka was thrust in my hands. I usually spurned this slightly sweet liqueur, a "ladies' tipple", to use the expression of the period, but there and then it tasted like nectar from paradise. Perhaps because I had not drunk alcohol of any sort for a long time, or perhaps because I was drinking upon a pretty empty stomach, I got tight. I did not get sick, it went to my head: a kind of confident, exalted drunkenness flooded me—I spent a happy hour in the basement of Szent Domonkos utca.

We were well aware that we were living in a temporary paradise for forced labourers and that we had the fact that Nagybaczoni Nagy was the minister to thank for this situation. It was only much later that I realized that his corrective measures would hardly have proved effective in Szent Domonkos utca if the heads of the holding depot centre had been hardened anti-Semites of the kind he expostulated against in his memoirs. No doubt there were such people among them—their presence made itself felt in the various trifling miseries that oppressed us during our stay there. Most memorable for me was the trick with the water-taps. There were only two toilets in the basement, which may have been sufficient for the school students during the day, but was alarmingly insufficient for the hordes of forced labourers. In addition there were the tiny wash-basins customary in schools, unsuitable for anything but washing our hands. It is easy to imagine what went on in the cramped lavatories in the mornings in the way of lining up, jostling, scrimmage, and confusion. On top of all this, the powers that be, using God knows what technical procedure, had the by-pass valves of the taps narrowed down so that the water trickled from them even more thinly than was usual. As a measure of economy? Supposedly on the basis of the consideration that "our boys" had to make do with even worse ablution facilities in Russia. Most of us tried to remedy our skimpy attempts to get ourselves clean in the evenings. These loathsome conditions turned not only my queasy stomach—they were commemorated in the marching song of the forced labour detail of Szent Domonkos utca, which was sung at least once a day, softly, but with deep feeling. I do not know who wrote it, who coined it—by the time we arrived it had attained its final form. It was sung to the melody of a dance-tune of the time and it began like this:

A little café on Szent Domonkos utca
Line up for a cuppa, do your bits!
Three volunteers to clean the latrines!
Gotta line up pal if you've got the shits.

The naturalism of the last two lines was a direct transposition from real life. For every day a member of the skeleton staff of the forced labour unit came down to the basement, stopped somewhere, we stood to attention, and he shouted: "Three volunteers for latrine duty!" Of course no one volunteered. So the soldier, if it was our turn, picked out the victims by pointing a finger at

random—or, rather, not quite at random, for he pointed at the first two: "You, and you", but the third, always the same, he called by name: "Kornitzer!"

The structure of occasional communities of this kind is such that there are always a favoured, privileged few among them—and some who are picked on, targets of ridicule, victims of dirty tricks. In Szent Domonkos utca one person represented the latter species, but blatantly. His appearance, as non-military as could be imagined, was conspicuous in itself: he wore a velour hat, a dark blue overcoat with velvet lapels, a dark jacket with black and grey striped trousers, and black oxfords—his brand–new rucksack was the only indication of his being a member of the forced labour unit. His face was always crumpled from lack of sleep, as though he had been on a binge. There wasn't a single idiotic trick that they did not try out on him, but the cruelest of all was that whenever one of the staff passed through the barracks, the boys began calling out Kornitzer's name. So his name was the only one the staff remembered, and every time we gave them trouble, it was always he who was taken to task. That is how he was always assigned latrine duty. But he performed even that without a word of complaint, with an unperturbed face. The surprising thing was that his appearance remained spruce and impeccable, and in spite of all the tricks and raillery, so did his manners. He rarely entered into conversation with us but when he did he always boasted of his successes as a journalist in an unpretentious way—for he was reputedly a journalist, though I never discovered where. When I once questioned him about what his job had been, his answer was exceedingly vague. He mentioned a book in which illustrious fathers and sons had written about each other, but he spoke mostly of the high society in which he moved. I did not understand much and believed even less of what he told me—for if he consorts with such notabilities, how come he is still here? But I did feel sorry for him. I was quite certain that he would freeze to death in that outfit as soon as he reached Russia.

Ten years later, talking to Andor Kellér, I mentioned Kornitzer and asked whether he had known a journalist of that name. Of course, he replied animatedly, he was a press–shark, always coming up with new ideas. His most sensational idea was the book entitled *Sons and Fathers*. The sons wrote on their famous fathers and fathers on their famous sons. Not artists or scholars of course, nor even doctors or lawyers, but generals and ministers, including the most renowned county Lord Lieutenants and chiefs of staff—beginning with Horthy himself. Of course, neither the sons nor the fathers begrudged making a sacrifice for such a reverential cause—he touched them for enormous sums. Then he published the book privately, but only in as many copies as there were people featured in it. So in essence it was an underground publication, only those who wrote it, or of whom it was written, ever saw it. The fact remains that he earned a great deal of money through it. But, I objected, he did not look as though he were rolling in money. Of course not, replied Kellér, because he gambled everything away—he usually played until dawn and always lost. He too thought it was very likely that Kornitzer had not survived the war, because he had not seen him since. Another ten years passed, and newspapers from the

West began to arrive, at least in the publishing offices, and once my eyes alighted on the fat letters above a leading review in *The Times Literary Supplement:* "The Eisenhower Family"—not quite by accident, for my gaze must have been attracted subconsciously not by the gigantic headline but by the name under it, set up in not quite so conspicuous print: *Bela Kornitzer.* Yes, the unusually long, three page review in one of the world's most illustrious weeklies was on the book written by my former pathetic comrade about the American president's family. There were some unimportant objections and corrections but, on the whole, the review praised and recognized his achievement as a historian. In short, his high-placed patrons had after all reached their hands into the merciless machinery to pluck Kornitzer out and saved him from his doom. He had somehow made it to America and there continued what he had begun at home—only to American standards. (How much did he touch the Eisenhower family for, I wonder?)

How come that I was not once, not even accidentally, assigned latrine duty? On no account was it because I was respected, nor was it due to my imposing appearance. On the contrary. Alapi confided to me later that not only my behaviour, even my appearance seemed greatly deranged in Szent Domonkos utca, for example, my clothes were always dotted with bits of straw. I remember how hard it was, in thought and in deed, to bring myself to wash every day, to overcome the artificial obstacles to cleanliness—I did not have the strength of mind to keep my clothes tidy as well, to pick off the bits of straw and other debris sticking to them—I just shrugged and thought they would do as they were. And it is true that the confusion, bordering on stupor, in which I joined up at Vilma királynő út and dragged out the days spent at Vác accompanied me to Szent Domonkos utca. They thought me "peculiar", confessed Alapi, laughed at me but were also afraid of me, left me out of almost everything, but took care not to make fun of me: they weren't sure how I'd react.

The only thing that could have relieved my confusion intensified it instead. It was the end of the year, the holidays were approaching, and it turned out that we would all be getting extraordinary leave, not just the privileged few in the private "mess", but we, the commoners, would also be permitted to go home several times, officially and en masse, on one occasion even to spend the night. This was obviously related to the fact that the staff were also dismissed on these occasions—and this too spoke of a more liberal atmosphere. Needless to say, I too was glad to be going home along with the others. It was good to be able to sleep my fill and wash properly and to eat food fit for human consumption off a table. Of course it was good to be with Mari again, though that was not a primary necessity for me, like sleeping and washing—I did not have the time nor the strength left for it. It only happened once, when we did not have to return to the barracks for the night and I could sleep at the flat in Pozsonyi út. It was not real loving, just one of life's favours, like a bath, or a good night's sleep, or a decent meal. With the difference that, while sleeping, bathing and a table laid for dinner gave me pure pleasure, being with Mari—even if it did not

involve sleeping with her—laid a burden on me. That of remorse. Even in my confusion I was aware of the irony of this observation. In the summer, when I had set out without restraint or impunity now with Marika, now with Piroska, I had felt no pangs of conscience for my double game. But that was just the point: I did not feel two-faced.

Now, in this damned state, when I was seeing only Mari, if and when I saw her at all, now I awakened to the fact that I was leading a double life! It would have been impossible, unimaginable to leave Marika to herself on my half-day's or full day's leave, to spare even an hour to meet Piroska—not to mention that I simply did not have the time to do this. But I felt it was just as absurd that I was free to spend half a day or a whole day roaming the city at will and not be able to see her. I yearned helplessly for her eyes, her voice, her words, her laughter. And I knew that she too yearned after me—irrespective of how much she yearned after Monori, whom she had had no news of. She continued to send him parcels to Russia, which Monori never got because the battalion staff expropriated all of them. Of course every time I was allowed home I called Piroska on the telephone. I gave her a brief account of my life in Szent Domonkos utca but most of the conversation was spent in making apologies for not being able to visit her, though she never remonstrated on my absence—true, I could only reach her at the workshop.

But on New Year's Eve, though we were permitted a full day's leave, I did not call Piroska, in other words I withheld from her the fact that I was home. Why? I was ashamed to apologize again. I shied away from the dissatisfaction of a telephone conversation. Most of all I needed unbroken mental energies for thinking. It was on that day that I decided that I would not go on, would break the vow I had made to myself two years earlier not to try to attempt suicide again. I thought it over and coolheadedly—or so I believed—determined that I had every right not to go on. Or had it not been a great achievement of the will to survive that, not quite a year after the fiasco of that relationship, I had wanted to give up the whole useless struggle but, recovering from the ignominious failure of my suicide, did I not have the gumption to slip into Katalin's ready-and-waiting bed? I could not of course take the credit for Marika appearing in my life: I had not sought her out—it was her mission to come to me. All I could credit myself with was that I did not resist this mercy but could return it with true love—still, this time, with all my might. It could be said in my favour that having successfully stemmed the tide of that love, doomed to be a morass of failure, threatening nevertheless to erupt, I had succeeded in civilizing its destructive power, selfishly but effectively, and had impounded it to irrigate gentler tracts. For I had known for some time that my magnificent, burning passion for Mari was complete only with this amendment, that this arrangement—which, despite all my vicissitudes and unconsciousness, I had after all so cleverly achieved—was the only thing that made me able to endure living and endure losing Eti, the awareness of which grew more and more painful as time passed.

From all this it is quite obvious that I wanted to live, very much so. But not at any cost. If fate—this was the word I used to myself, for I did not have the time for a closer definition—chooses to test my capacity for living under increasingly difficult conditions, if its crude hands upset that delicate equilibrium with which that arrangement was suspended, then no one can remonstrate with me for renouncing it once and for all. To which I can add as an afterthought that I could never consider suicide a sin—and never found it referred to as a sin in the Bible, which by then I had often read. Not that I brooded over it much. Let it be enough that I felt that living a double life was a sin and committing suicide was not.

Three boxes of Sevenal—that was all that remained of my secret store, hoarded after Eti's death. I put them in my pocket. Thirty tablets will be more than enough. Then, at home still, I wrote two short farewell notes. I do not remember the exact words but the contents were essentially the same: I thanked them for everything, told them I loved them, asked them to forgive me, sent them kisses. I sealed both envelopes, addressed them with care, and put them in my pocket. I did not write a farewell note to my parents. That night, when we arrived at Szent Domonkos utca again, the basement was too full of stir and bustle to permit an opportunity for such a private act. I found the night-life of the barracks much too lively the second and the third night too, but I was not nervous or impatient. Ever since I had the three packets and the letters in my pocket, I was able to contemplate the scene and the life around me with much more forbearance. In the "mess" they played cards in the evenings now—usually chemin de fer. For that matter, there was hardly anyone left to ask me to join them, my friend Alapi had been unobtrusively discharged during the holidays—I did not try to find out how. We had not even had the opportunity to say goodbye. I do not remember how many days passed until I deemed the field and the situation suitable for the execution of the most important act of my life—for I was aware that I was preparing for the most important act of my life. It was with perfect equanimity that I took the thirty tablets in the dark and drank a whole tin cup of water, put the two addressed envelopes under my head and lay quietly down on the straw.

I did not notice how much time passed before the tablets began to take effect. But I did remember—much later of course—that this was the most exalted, triumphant hour of my life. Or half-hour—but a great many images, feelings and thoughts can be compressed into half an hour. My first thought was that I would never have to get up off this straw again. There would be no more reveilles. No more struggle for a little water to wash in, for a couple of hard-pressed minutes on the filthy toilet. I ascended higher and higher on the stairway of my victory. I do not have to be afraid anymore. I shall not be taken to Russia. I do not have to wait until Hitler is defeated—I have already defeated him. I was flushed with elation—brought on by the Sevenal? No. It was the flush of victory. I thought of Marika and Piroska. Not of the joy they had given me—in their separate, distinct ways. But that I was free of them at last. That I had put an end to my double life. As I lay unmoving on the straw I

rose higher and higher, above those snoring around me, into the liberty I had won for myself, towards Eti, for it was to her that I set out, into the unknown other—world, and if there is no hereafter, then it will be in the Void that I will be united with her again—though I could not for the life of me imagine the Void at all. At any rate, I fell asleep in great happiness.

Is the other–world so soldierly too, then?—these are purported to be my first words upon waking in Rókus Hospital. I do not remember saying them—a nurse told me about it later, when I had fully regained consciousness. I do not know why I said it: discipline was not much stricter in the Rókus than elsewhere. But even after waking I lay confused and dizzy in bed, and this dazedness lasted for some days. Marika was my first visitor. Piroska arrived directly after her. I could not speak to them for long but, as it turned out, there was no need for me to speak—they spoke instead, reassuring and comforting me. Of course I was glad to see both of them. Then Alapi came—I do not remember whether it was on the same day or the next—and from his chance remarks I could piece together what had happened. I realized I had committed a blunder—I had not taken into account the loud rattle in my throat as my breathing changed, which had been loud enough to wake my companions–in–straw, and they had found the empty packets. They knew that Alapi was a good friend of mine, and an efficient one besides, so they had called him first—I don't know how they had managed to get to a telephone—and reported to the cadre only later. They had waken Alapi in the middle of the night, but he had got up and dressed at once, had thrown himself into a taxi and had arrived at Szent Domonkos utca in the space of minutes. According to military regulations, I should have been taken to the military hospital on Róbert Károly körút, where I would obviously have attained my goal before getting in, or where I would have been put on the roll, in due course. Instead, Alapi persuaded Sergeant Kulacsos—by what means I do not know—to have me taken to Rókus Hospital straight away, as is customary in the case of civilians, where, before entering my particulars in any kind of book, my stomach was washed out immediately. Thus Alapi saved my life, owing to his impetuosity—which I have, to tell the truth, been unable to forgive him to this day.

In the morning he called on Piroska—who did not have a telephone—in Kamilla's workshop. That was where he told her about the new adversity that had befallen me. The next step was to call Marika at the Giraud and put her in the picture. Marika—as Alapi related later—arrived at the pottery workshop in an amazingly short period of time from Angyalföld. She did not lose her head either, did not even cry, and acknowledged without a word that Piroska too would be a member of the exclusive council of war. She made no objection against Alapi being the one to designate which of them should visit me and when—he had had previous practice, for it was he who arranged for Sárika and Lola to visit Darnói in turns in the labour camp at Szentendre in the summer. For the time being, however, no visitors were allowed in to see me, as I had not yet regained consciousness. And there were more urgent tasks than visiting me: a lot of money had to be found, small change would be needed in the

hospital and in Szent Domonkos utca to make my circumstances more comfortable. In fact a large sum of money would be needed, for he, that is Alapi, could get me discharged, could get me off labour service for good if he had it—which was not hard to believe, considering he himself had just been discharged under very mysterious circumstances. And I needed to be discharged even more than he had done—for if I had to stay, the least they would do would be to put me in the penal battalion for a self-inflicted injury. But who could they get the money from? Who else but Mr Vas, in other words, my father. Of course if I had regained consciousness by then I could have told them to save their breath, it wasn't worth the trouble, they would never get money for such a purpose from that quarter. But in the fervour of the moment, he called my father and told him he had to speak to him urgently on my behalf. My father reluctantly agreed to see him, but it seems he took care not to allow Alapi into the flat in Sas utca—though he had already called there once three years earlier, when he came to announce that he wanted to recite *Song of Solitude*—and fixed a meeting in the Berlin coffee–house on Szent István körút instead.

Alapi took Piroska with him to the rendezvous—God knows why he took her and not Marika. Perhaps because my father had never met Marika, but knew Piroska and in fact respected her—of course the acquaintance dated back to the time when he knew her as the wife of a rich textile-merchant from Tisza István utca and two years had gone by since. It is possible that Alapi chose Piroska only because he had known her longer than me. So, at a table in the Berlin coffee–house, they related what had happened together. "He always wants something extra, that one!", was my father's first comment on my attempted suicide. If all the others can put up with it, then his son can put up with it too, after all, he had been a soldier in the war (in the Great War) and it had done no harm to his health. Piroska began to explain that this was different, that I would probably be posted to the penal battalion, but Alapi interrupted and broached the question of money. The penal battalion means certain death, he tried to explain, and the only way to evade it is to get me discharged. He knew a way to do this, but it costs two thousand pengős. Two thousand pengős was of course a great deal of money in those days. It was the equivalent of two Baumgarten awards, or ten months' pay—I would have had to translate 40 to 50 printer's sheets for it. My father did not deny that he could pay the two thousand pengős, but, irrespective of the fact that he did not approve of such transactions, he would never dare entrust such a large sum to either Alapi or to Piroska. In the end he may have felt slightly ashamed for himself for dismissing them with such a flat refusal, for he volunteered a compromise solution and suggested they should call on Béla—my lawyer uncle who had always been considered the brains of the family—tell him about the situation, and if he approved of the plan, then he, that is to say my father, would do as advised.

Upon which they, poor souls, set off at once for Béla's office—true, it was not far. Béla did not know either of them, but he did know Alapi's father-in-law, who was also a lawyer doing thriving business, so he welcomed them fairly politely. He, unlike my father, understood the gravity of the situation at

once, and had heard enough about the penal battalion. What is more, he considered criminal miscegenation an even more serious charge than deliberate self–mutilation, especially after he heard that neither Piroska nor Marika had received my farewell notes, as both of them had been confiscated as official evidence, and Sergeant Kulacsos, who had had me taken to Rókus Hospital instead of the military hospital upon Alapi's emphatic persuasion, could not be prevailed upon to suppress the evidence even on the strength of arguments of the most emphatic kind—Alapi had promised him a steam-laundry. But, precisely because of the danger involved, Béla considered Alapi's plan to liberate me too risky, whatever it might entail, as, in this situation, increased attention would be paid to my affairs and, if any kind of irregularity were to be discovered, the reprisals to come would be all the more severe—no, he cannot in all conscience advise my father to support Alapi's plan. He expressed this opinion to my father also, adding that my father was quite right in not placing his trust in Alapi or Piroska. He told me all this in person when he visited me in hospital some days later. I did not argue with him.

I had neither the strength nor the inclination to do so. Béla came primarily to question me about the two confiscated farewell notes, was more closely interested in the contents of the letter addressed to Marika—he was still greatly concerned about the possible charge of miscegenation. I was not overly worried about it: I did not remember the words of my farewell note but I could not imagine writing anything that could have proved sexual contact, and besides I did not think it likely that they would try to ferret out whether there was a girl with whom the law forbids me sexual relations among the addressees.

I had no idea even then of how many days I spent in hospital—I seem to recall that as soon as I was on my feet again they chucked me out and I had to report back to Szent Domonkos utca. Alapi came to pick me up with Piroska and they took me back to the school by taxi—or, rather, took me up to the gates and watched me go in—anxiously, as they told me later, for I could not walk in a straight line, only in zigzags. It was getting dark, I reported in, then lay down on my reserved place on the straw, dazed and nauseated. Some time later my neighbours called my attention to the lady standing in the doorway of the basement, who wanted to speak to me. I stumbled over to her: a dark female figure stood on the stairs, I recognized her by the healing pale radiance of her face. It was Rózsi, my mother's friend and former class-mate, whose visits had brought gentle smiles and tranquillity—if temporarily—into the tensions and grimness of our family life in my childhood, and who, fifteen years ago, had helped with such active idealism Kati sell the necklace she had appropriated from her mother when she became pregnant by Pali Simon—a miserable business which cost me dear, thanks to Kassák's questionable intervention. She stood now on the stairs with the same healing smile. I had no idea how she had learned that I would be getting back from hospital just then, understood even less how she had managed to get in—I saw no soldiers nearby. She told me she only came to see how I was. By way of farewell she handed me a bottle

of cool milk. No drink of milk—no draught even of wine—has ever tasted so good to me as it did that night. But the next day I was still barely able to stand. Sergeant Kulacsos was considerate enough to excuse me morning drill, I lay on my straw all day. Far from mocking me, my companions treated me with compassion and solicitude. One of my neighbours, Ágoston by name, one or two years older than I, treated me with almost parental gentleness. I know nothing about his subsequent fate, because I never looked him up again—not out of ingratitude, but because I was ashamed of his having seen me in so helpless a state. This dazed, nauseous helplessness did not abate even by the third day. Sergeant Kulacsos advised me to have a medical and ask for three days' leave, at home I would soon get well. Yes, but medicals were not held in Szent Domonkos utca, but at the headquarters in Vilma királynő út where I had joined up. He sent me off there right away with a group led by a soldier. I was reeling, I could barely keep in step, only the hope of lying in my own bed that night gave me strength. There were not many of us waiting for medical examination, it was soon my turn. The medical officer—I did not notice his rank even then—was a fair, good-looking man of about my age. I tried to compose myself and related the story of my suicide, complained about my present condition, and asked for three days' leave. The medical officer looked at me searchingly, pulled up my eyelids with two fingers, glanced at my eyes and it was over—we had to wait for the result of the examination outside. In a while the soldier who had escorted us came out and handed out the verdict to each of us. I looked at my paper and at first noticed only the signature, Dr Károly Esztergályos, and only later made out the words assigning me to the psychiatric ward of the military hospital for the purpose of observation and diagnosis. Black despair assailed me. I had deluded myself with the false hope of three days' convalescence and now they were sending me to be submitted to some new kind of torture. I think I am using the precise expression when I say that I was beside myself with rage when I sprang up from my chair and before anyone could stop me, rushed straight into the room, stopped before the medical officer and yelled at him:

"Doctor,"—that was how I addressed him, in the civilian way—"I did not ask for a medical examination, I asked for leave!"

He out-yelled me:

"How do you think you dare? How dare you speak to me this way! What makes you think you can tell me what to do?" Then suddenly he grew calm and continued quietly, almost gently, with a half–smile: "Your nerves are on edge, as your behaviour of a moment ago attests. I cannot tell what your mental state is. That is for specialists to decide. We shall see what can be done for you on the basis of their diagnosis."

I suddenly recovered my senses.

"I am sorry," I mumbled, ashamed.

I bowed and walked out.

As I marched back to Szent Domonkos utca with the others, my steps a little steadier than they had been when we set out from there, my half–dazed brain

recalled the slip of paper in my pocket, the signature looming clearest of all: Esztergályos... The name suddenly seemed familiar. I had heard that name before somewhere, or had seen it—but where? I simply could not remember. I did not know of course—how could I have known?—but soon learned of all that had been done on my behalf. Béla especially had proved most effective. He had learned that the officer commanding the Szent Domonkos utca headquarters, whose name I cannot remember, as I have also forgotten whether he was a colonel or only a lieutenant–colonel, was a lawyer in civilian life, with whom he had been closely associated in the past. He had spoken to him and tried to persuade him not to let my bungled suicide attempt end in the penal battalion. An even more useful idea was to call on another colleague, István Ries, a Social Democrat lawyer, who was the father–in–law of our battalion M.O., and induce him to intercede with his son–in–law on my behalf. Mihály András Rónai, for his part, greatly concerned about me, like a true friend, called our doctor's father on one of his leaves: János Esztergályos, one of the most honest representatives of the Social Democrats in parliament, of whom I had heard and read only good. It couldn't have been difficult to reach him, for Mityu Rónai was by then on the editorial staff of *Népszava*, and his word obviously had weight in persuading Esztergályos to make it clear to his son that I was a poet who must be got out of a hole. Alapi, poor soul, was sparing no pains to cajole Kulacsos, but to do this he had to produce the "means" himself, as both my father and Béla—while refusing him the two thousand out of mistrust—had forgotten to supply him with money for tips. For this reason he promised the sergeant that he would get him a steam–laundry—for that was what the sergeant had set his heart on. And Piroska promised the only thing she could offer in honesty, that she would paint his much–loved young daughter in oils.

Of all this, as I say, I knew nothing. But I did somehow sense that doctor Esztergályos had unexpectedly become an ally, and that he had made this clear to me with perilous openness, considering that there had been other officers in the room with him. I realized that he had dealt me a trump card, or, to put it more simply, had thrown me a life–line, the excuse of moral irresponsibility to serve as an attenuating circumstance—and that it now depended on me whether I would be able to make the best of the opportunity. The next day, as I marched without any difficulty at the centre of a group led by a soldier towards the military hospital in Róbert Károly körút, where I should have been taken on the eve of my suicide, in which case I would now be safely over all my troubles, I felt that my whole system was prepared to do battle. Which did not mean a firm resolve to win, but the indisruptable fusion of some kind of helpless daze and a tense alertness. In the corridor I waited for my turn without impatience—my name was last to be called. I started towards the open door with firm, resolute steps, but when I reached it—I have no idea why I did this—I came to an abrupt halt. An officer called out:

"Why don't you come in?"

"Because I can't get through the door," I replied with conviction. A young nurse appeared from somewhere, took my arm and led me gently to a table, around which five or six officers were sitting, with a sleek–haired lieutenant-colonel in the middle. One of the officers asked:

"Why are you here?"

"Because my father had me called up for forced labour service," I replied totally spontaneously again. Spontaneously, but not wholly unreasonably, for, as I realized while I uttered this unexpected answer, if my father's behaviour—as both Piroska and Alapi had recounted it to me in hospital—had caused me no surprise, his indifference to my fate did weigh on my mind. All this flashed through me in the space of a moment, for the officer was already asking me the next question.

"And why did he have you called up?"

"Because he wanted to be rid of me." This was said wittingly, remembering that the day before, lying half-dazed on the straw, I had got so far as to think that it would probably be a great convenience to my father if I were to die, the sooner the better. But now the lieutenant–colonel took over the questioning:

"What is your occupation?"

"I am a poet," I said, clear-headed by then, aware of the risk I was taking, that they had all my particulars and that it was unlikely that I was really a clerk if I were to be pronounced of unsound mind. But the lieutenant–colonel did not glance into his papers, just continued to question me:

"Is that what you do for a living?"

"I live at home," I replied carefully, for that could not count as a lie.

"Could you recite one of your poems to us?"

After some thought I began *Introspection*, written a year before.

In the tight narrow pit of introspection
Here I lie on my miserable bed.
Turning on the live coals of sin in darkness,
Dreaming oft of the lower regions of Hell.
And look back upon a chaos of images:
Where am I to find that twist in my soul
That will raise me beyond my hideous end?

"Thank you, that will be enough," interrupted the lieutenant–colonel, and cast his eyes around his officers, who nodded significantly.

The examination was over. I kept in step contentedly on the way back, content with my intelligence or, rather, not so much with my intelligence as with my unwitting shrewdness, with my fortunate behaviour even. Of course I wasn't out of the woods yet—we'd see what would happen the day after tomorrow. All the same, Sergeant Kulacsos treated me as though I had already won my case. By the time we got back, Szent Domonkos utca was in a commotion. It was announced that a member of a forced labour unit—not attached to our headquarters—had been caught attempting escape and sen-

tenced to death, and that all the forced labour units in the capital would be paraded to witness his death by hanging as a caution—assembly after lunch in the courtyard. I showed up at assembly but Sergeant Kulacsos sent me back to the barracks, saying such a spectacle was not for someone as weak–nerved as myself. I was not happy about this exemption for I thought it would not hurt me to see it, but on the other hand, this considerateness led me to conclude that it looked as though I would be put on the sick–list. So I lay down in my place and fell asleep exhausted as if I had undergone a real trial of strength. My companions returned towards evening greatly disappointed, for there had been such a crowd, and they had stood at such a distance, that they had not seen a thing.

Next day after breakfast I too lined up for drill, but Kulacsos made me stand aside, saying that until we got the results of the examination the next day, I was to rest. I did not go back to the barracks, but watched my companions from a distance in the pleasant cold. An about–turn was not executed smartly enough for his liking, so Sergeant Kulacsos began to roar:

"What kind of turn was that?! What are you, a flock of fatted geese? D'you think that just because the Russians have surrounded the Germans at Stalingrad you can slouch around as the spirit moves you? Down!"

Never have grown-up men flung themselves flat on the ground with such joy as they did then on the icy cobblestones of the school courtyard. We had got used to Sergeant Kulacsos camouflaging the freshest news from London Radio in his dressing-downs and, according to our most recent information, the Russians had retreated from Stalingrad. Kulacsos must have felt the inspiring effect of his words, and good–heartedly wanted to heighten it, for some time later I heard:

"Is that supposed to be a file? It's cow–piss! Kornitzer!"—of course, his name was the only one he knew—"What are you waiting for? For Churchill to march into Berlin? Just because he said so? Well, let me reassure you, he isn't going to march into Szent Domonkos utca."

The next day, that is the third day after the examination, we marched once more toward Róbert Károly körút. There were more of us than there had been two days earlier—I don't know where they came from, but four others from another unit were attached to our battalion—they were from Ruthenia, from around Huszt, Orthodox Jews, though you could not tell from their appearance, since they were all wearing the same outfit as we of the old group. We set out early, as the evening before it had been announced that we would be getting overnight leave, until Sunday evening, and we wanted to get back in time so as not to miss the handing out of passes. I was not nearly as elated in keeping step as I had been two days earlier. I had hardly slept the night before, had tossed and turned restlessly—no, there was hardly room for tossing and turning—had turned cautiously, weighing my chances. No, impossible, they can't have been taken in by my transparent bluffs, nor by those indirectly sincere emotions erupting from the depths of my consciousness. I must be glad if I get the three days' sick–leave that I had originally planned on. And if I get it, will they count the Sunday in, when I should be home on leave anyway?

The hospital this time was bustling and busy: officers, soldiers, forced labourers, doctors, nurses, patients teemed in the corridors. We waited a long time until our turn came. They called us in one by one, no one spent more than a minute inside, just until he got his orders. It seemed my feet had gone to sleep, I could hardly move when I heard my name called. I did not have the time to read the paper I received, but felt that it was thicker and harder than those the others had been given, and bigger. I had a look at it outside. It was a printed form filled out in ink, I could hardly read the title, written in big block capitals, because as my eyes fell on it the letters blurred: CERTIFICATE OF UNFITNESS. When my eyes cleared, it was easier to make out what was written above it in tiny letters: *schizophrenia*. I did not understand, could not absorb what had happened to me, all the more as a passionate quarrel broke out among our group in the hospital doorway. My companions had awakened to the realization that we would most probably miss the distribution of passes. It had occurred to one of them that we should take a tram instead of walking. Alright, agreed the soldier escorting us (his leave was at stake too), if we pay the tram fare, his too, of course. That goes without saying, my companions replied, not so the Orthodox Jews. Their religion forbids them to travel on Saturdays. But this way we shall all lose our Saturday and Sunday leaves! They are very sorry about that, but there is nothing they can do. What kind of religion was this anyway, that takes no account of comradely behaviour? The Law is more important, said the Orthodox Jews. The dispute was beginning to degenerate into an anti–Semitic furore—on the reform Jews' part. Luckily they realized in time that we would be forfeiting our leaves, so we all set out on foot—in other words, the Orthodox Jews won. Szent Domonkos utca was in fact fairly empty by the time we arrived, but our staff had waited for us, the officers too, so my companions got their passes, and they made out my discharge papers. I was only able to say goodbye to Sergeant Kulacsos, and left my tender–hearted neighbours a note of grateful thanks.

I did not pay much attention to my parents, when I got home. They could not begin to understand what I had gone through. It took me a long time to understand the significance of what had happened to me. It was only when I read in my certificate of unfitness: *Classified unfit for all kinds of service*, that I realized I need never fear labour service again. I could begin my life once again, with its unresolvable duality.

I had been set free, but had not managed to escape.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Zsuzsa Kapecz

The Cat

(Short story)

Every day I cross under the river. Only twice on quiet days, but sometimes I go as many as four or even six times. Down below, in the prison of the carriage, as I look at the bodies hitting each other in the grey filtered light and the heads nodding to the waves of movement—slightly inanely, slightly distantly, as if I weren't really there, as if my life were only linked to the others accidentally, like the carriages fastened to each other that jolt to the same beat, and on the sides of which the metallic numbers sparkling coldly never follow one another in order, and it doesn't matter where I squeeze myself in—as the smell of burning rubber seeps in from under the closing doors, as the eternal draught lifts the dust, I always imagine the current of the river and the distant feel, taste and smell of the water at dawn or dusk, lost in childhood memories.

The imagination can claim only a little time because the trains only go one stop in the river-bed. I usually get out at the stop after that, I'm an average looking passenger, among the other passengers, my age, sex, name count for nothing here in the depths as, together with the crowd inching forward in one direction, the escalator slowly raises us out of the cavity. Outside I find myself in one of the ugliest, most disorderly squares in the district, with a congestion of tram-lines, pillars, cars, stalls and the grim metal body and aggressive features of a fountain cum statue. In winter the buildings are immersed in a dome of smoke, in summer the fermenting smells of the nearby market are wafted here in thick gusts.

On mild nights, the homeless sleep around the fountain, and a few drunks loiter around the metro entrance. The asphalt is littered with the debris of broken bottles, food scraps, cigarette butts, and newspapers. All around the grass is worn, the leaves of the trees are crumpled and dusty, the colour green is missing from the picture. It's hard to get used to the pervasive grime everywhere: it gradually prods people into slovenliness. There's only one really clean person in town, the mad woman. When she sits there on one of the benches in the square, at a carefully measured distance from everyone, in her spotless white coat and white gloves, she's like a serene island whose land is out of bounds. She doesn't speak to anyone, she doesn't even answer when

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Zsuzsa Kapecz *is a poet and author of a play for children.*

she's spoken to, as if words themselves would be contaminating. She carries a sponge and rag with her in a polythene bag and cleans every patch of the place before she touches it.

That day in the depths, within the circle of the river and the earth, the inner senses had added another, stronger smell to the dankness of imprisonment, that of decay. It was autumn, soon it would be All Saints' Day. The thrall of mouldering was circulating in the air and in hearts. Bodies packed tightly against each other, sweating, with stifled irritation, almost motionless. I didn't move either. I suffered the enforced proximity of total strangers, and I didn't try to elbow my way here and there in the hope of being able to sit down, because my mind was somewhere else.

I was full of the sight of another square, in the city centre, from where I had come hurrying down to the station on slippery steps. It was dusk by then, the scene was made up of darkness, twilight and tiny loitering lights, like some sort of living hand-woven cloth. People were swaying around at the side of the old church, by the crumbling stone crucifix, with white chrysanthemums and candles in their hands. I could not see the face of the statue, the body and head were lost in the thickening darkness, but at the feet, freshly lit candles were multiplying like little sparkling stars. A strong wind was blowing, and the flames flickered defencelessly, just as the souls of those for whom they were now burning and whose memory they recalled had once done. Adored gods from centuries ago emerged from my memory, I saw their likenesses in the old books proclaiming wisdom, the stories of which told of wax candles and sacrificial wax figures burning on ancient altars to the accompaniment of the shaking of bells and singing. The redeemers and guiders of souls, who extend their wings above us and lead us all into the light beyond the mighty gate, have changed their forms many times, but the faith directed at them, the candles and the gifts, have been the same since time immemorial.

I had gone to the church square by chance, I just stood there watching the mourning of unknown people. I started to suspect something even then, yet the fascination which held me there only gave the frame to an imagined painting or photograph, and not to feelings. When later on I crossed beneath the river and got to the surface again in the grip of another square, I caught sight of the mad woman. It was completely dark by then, from the sky hoar frost descended, you could feel through the asphalt that the ground was frozen. The woman was sitting quite alone in the ray of dim lamplight, the wing of her white coat almost luminous, the wind tugging at it fiercely. She didn't bother about the cold, she sat there calm and impassive, her back straight. She was like a smaller statue at the foot of the larger one and, as I went past her, I caught a flash of her slightly wicked, slightly pitying expression. It was as if she knew that she had a mission, but she didn't have to lift a finger to carry it out. Once again I was flooded with pictures from my memories, the premonitions of a visionary painter who wrestled with knife-wielding angels and fallen saints on his canvasses because he knew more about the world than to believe that innocence could be preserved and should perhaps even be rewarded.

The woman sat on the bench stiffly, almost proudly. Though she didn't have a knife in her hand, only the polythene bag with faded lettering, and she wasn't shrouded in a white cloud, but a coat washed threadbare, even so for me she was the emotionless angel of death silently waiting. It was when I walked past the bench that I felt the shock of recognition that there was trouble, big trouble with this town, and afterwards I remembered that it was then that I felt the threat—I read it in the woman's mistrustful and, at the same time, defensive look—and not after I had turned the corner and seen the cat weaving about a few metres from the inn.

I had stopped in the middle of the square. A boy with a knitted cap came up to me, eyeing me with a weary look, and pressed a bit of paper into my hand. On it was a home-duplicated text in tortuous handwriting. "For since I spoke, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil, because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." At the bottom of the page someone had scribbled in pencil in childish letters: "And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew and repented not." I turned round and took a few hesitant steps to ask the child which church he belonged to, but I couldn't see him anywhere. At the lamp-post, wedding music was blaring, women in gaudy kerchiefs were selling impossibly coloured carnations from their baskets, and youths in leather jackets were prowling around the newspaper-vendor. Further on two drunks were hitting a third. As I reached the far side of the square I caught sight of the old prophet who was just as much part of the place as the mad woman was. His angular figure was clothed in a dark jacket, his beard came down almost to his waist, and he was carrying a huge cardboard sign like a sandwichman. I would like to have read it, to have seen this time what was written on the board fastened to his back, but the old man was leaning against the wall, glaring sometimes with contempt, sometimes with anger at the people who smirked at him as they walked past on the pavement. All of a sudden he raised his fist and shook it at me, his beard quivering, and a word on the board stood out with neon-like vibration: "God". I went on looking around for a while, in case the boy with the knitted cap was with the old man, but he had disappeared without a trace.

The figure of the old prophet was gradually lost in the darkness as I drew away from him. There was a church here too in one corner of the square, grim and cumbersome, just like the religion whose followers had built it. The cross on its spire was barely visible, hidden as it was by oppressive fog. I remembered the devotion, the lights at the foot of the statue in the city centre first flickering, then burning wilder and wilder in the wind. Not far from the place of mourning another kind of church stood with its rounded domes, belonging to a different set of believers, whose faith was proclaimed by stars. On the Day of Atonement, though, their eyes were filled with the same sadness as those who said their prayers at the foot of the stone statue. No proud cross was shining on the top of the domes, so swift and sly hands drew crosses on the church wall, all around

it, under the protection of night's shield. But they were crosses of hatred, not love, turning inside out and debasing an ancient swastika which at one time, in the golden age, demonstrated eternity, the wheel of the world, which turns for ever and ever. This symbol was as similar to the man kneeling in devotion as to the man kneeling in his defencelessness, as if the same hand had created the sublime and rancorous crosses, and the same hand would still confer blessings and curses.

I left the other side of the square too and turned into a narrow, cobbled street where the stench of exhaust fumes and the smell of drink hit my nose at the same time. The entrance to the taproom led down some rickety slippery stairs, and the din could have come straight out of hell. Downstairs in the illuminated cave, in the yellowy light of the lamps, there was not one pleasant face, not one slim, attractive body, not one gesture which would have suggested human dignity. The scruffy figures staggered with no thought or purpose. They gave the impression of distorted wax dummies, laid on the altar to the eternal god of alcohol as a pointless sacrifice. Their souls were corrupted, their days had been wasted, the vacant expression in their eyes was as empty as their lives.

I went on my way towards the bus-stop with my head down. When I looked up I noticed something very odd, which at first glance might have seemed funny, but in fact was shocking. A shrunken knight in armour was stumbling along beside the wall, a strange, helmeted, centaur-like monster, a freakish cross between a knight and a horse, the sort of sight in the dark street which would suggest I too had been drinking. The animal drew away a little from the building, turning towards the middle of the road, and the narrow tin cylinder which had been forced onto its head glinted in the neon lighting. It was a wine measure, made of aluminium, which had been so ingeniously clamped over the cat's head that it couldn't get rid of it. Blind and deaf, the cat weaved in and out among the cars with a wonderful instinct, and every time I bent down to help it, it jumped away. Suddenly it started to run, then climbed through the bars of one of the padlocked gates of the market, its clattering gradually growing softer as it disappeared between the dark stalls.

I stood on the other side of the fence and prayed to Him who has the soul of every living creature and every human being in His hands. Then I slowly made my way back. Rotting vegetables and a few torn cardboard boxes lay at the side of the road, I stumbled and hit myself against the wall. And do we fumble and stagger in the blind darkness like a drunk? The awakening—it's true—causes unbearable suffering.

Translated by Elizabeth Szász

Ildikó Nagy

Organic Architecture Going Hungarian

Budapest's largest exhibition space, the Műcsarnok, is under renovation. The nearly one hundred years old classicist building needs a thorough sprucing-up, which will include not only expansion—with modern performance and projection space in the basement—but a restoration to its original condition, with a cafeteria and small terrace, open in summer. This is all expected to take a year and a half, during which time the most important temporary exhibitions will find a home in the Ernst Museum.

The Ernst Museum, named after its founder, the art collector Lajos Ernst, opened in 1912 as a museum and exhibition space near the Opera and the Academy of Music. The interior was designed by Elek Falus, and József Rippl-Rónai created the staircase windows. The overall effect is reminiscent of the 1910s, with the bridled exuberance and elegance of art nouveau, which already aims at function, though it retains certain decorative aspects. The benches of the front hall are fanciful combinations of black, green, and yellow marbles, and the stained-glass windows are unparalleled small masterpieces. None of this disturbs the context of the ever-changing exhibitions, giving them a setting, rather. It is questionable whether later artists will achieve this ideal proportion essential to any work's durability, consisting of a sensitive balance between the elements of artistic creation: sensory impression and abstract intellectuality.

It was in these halls that the most interesting exhibition of the autumn of 1991 was displayed, featuring Hungarian organic architecture. Thus the modernity of the beginning of the century mingled with the postmodernism of its end.

The photographs, plans and models of the exhibition were first displayed to great acclaim at the Fifth International Architectural Biennale in Venice. Foreign observers, journalists, architects, and art historians had particular admiration for the fact that the Hungarians exhibited completed projects, while architects from other countries mainly showed projected plans. There is a reason for this—and a price to be paid for it.

If we say of contemporary postmodern architecture that it is the product of a

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post-industrial society, then we may reasonably call its Hungarian equivalent the expression of a pre-industrial one. All the more so since the architects themselves aver that their ideas are in the spirit and practice of an ancient tradition of craftsmanship—not only in their conceptual and architectural forms, but in their materials and techniques as well. None of this is foreign to postmodernism, that broad catch-all term, which embraces the products of high-tech fantasy as well as the assembled scraps of a do-it-yourself technology. Postmodernism, since it stems from an ideology, is independent of technology.

Modern architecture has undertaken to make the building the embodiment of function and static power, while postmodern architecture regards the building as a means of communication. As long as we wish to create actual, functional buildings and not merely plans of the imagination, everything depends on the harmonization of function and fiction. The modern architect calls himself an engineer, even a sociologist. In contrast, the postmodern architect sees himself as an artist, philosopher, a prophet. This entails a proliferation of ideal forms (spheres, cupolas, central spaces, and the like) and prefigurative structures. Architecture again, as at other times, is experimenting with being *architecture parlante*. Thus Ribot's plans for the "Elephant-Shaped House" (1958), which he had wanted to construct on the Champs-Elysées, meets Charles Moore's building complex in New Orleans ("Piazza d'Italia," 1976-79), whose central motif—a small piazza with a water-basin and an island extending into it—is Italy itself, the boot intruding from the Alps into the Mediterranean, the whole surrounded by the requisite structures of Italy (columns, ruins of columns and the like).

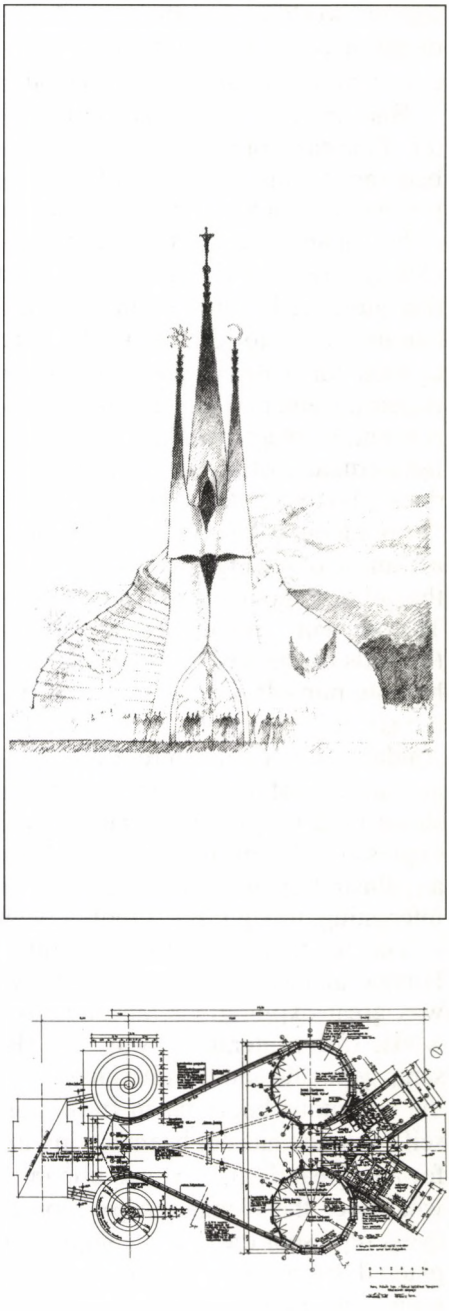
Hungarian organic architecture finds its place in this general atmosphere, though it is not "organic" in the sense that modern architecture uses the term, following Frank Lloyd Wright. Rather, the term indicates a current of postmodern thought. Wright built a famous house above and around a natural waterfall (for E.J. Kaufmann, 1936), Imre Makovecz lifted an enormous oak tree—root and branch—from a nature preserve along the Danube, and sent it to the Hungarian pavilion at the World's Fair in Seville. This is fundamentally different.

There are two founding fathers of Hungarian organic architecture: Imre Makovecz and György Csete. They, and their students, present themselves at this exhibition, which offered a view of a well-defined, closed strand of Hungarian architecture. It should be emphasized that this is in no way synonymous with modern Hungarian architecture, although it is the most conspicuous, most influential, and officially preferred side of it. Abroad, it is almost the only side that is known.

Imre Makovecz (b. 1935) started his working life in various state designing offices. His rebellious views and his strong will made it impossible for him to conform either to the contemporary hierarchical structure, or to the architectural practices of the time, which tended to flatten individual vision. He soon became the enfant terrible of the profession, and quite properly acquired the aura of a special personality. From 1977 to 1984, he was the chief architect of

the Pilis Forest, a place of refuge for him but a terrible waste for Hungarian architecture, since one of the period's most original architects was entrusted with small park buildings, taverns, inns, and lookout points. During this time he, of course, continued his private projects (family houses and competitions), and, when the possibility presented itself, in 1984 he started Makona, a private firm. His students of earlier years have now became colleagues. After two or three years of practice, the students generally branch off to form their own firms, so there is a constant turnover, broadly disseminating the characteristic Makovecz style.

This style has a triple ancestry: Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, Hungarian peasant architecture and Hungarian folk-art nouveau (primarily influenced by Ödön Lechner). In the sixties this required a praiseworthy boldness. In that decade Hungary saw the late territorial expansion of modernism, the reawakening of the Bauhaus spirit but simultaneously its vulgarization and superficialization. Makovecz opposed this from the start. He instinctively became "postmodern," in step with a trend that was appearing in Europe at the time. He himself called his architecture "organic" and "canonical." Organic yes, but in the sense established by Steiner, inasmuch as, typically, the building becomes identical with the human body. "A building is a face," declares Makovecz as well. The anatomy of the human body, and the forms of the body in motion, were models for his prefigurative architecture. They also determine the canon, whose basis is symmetry. He holds that this same



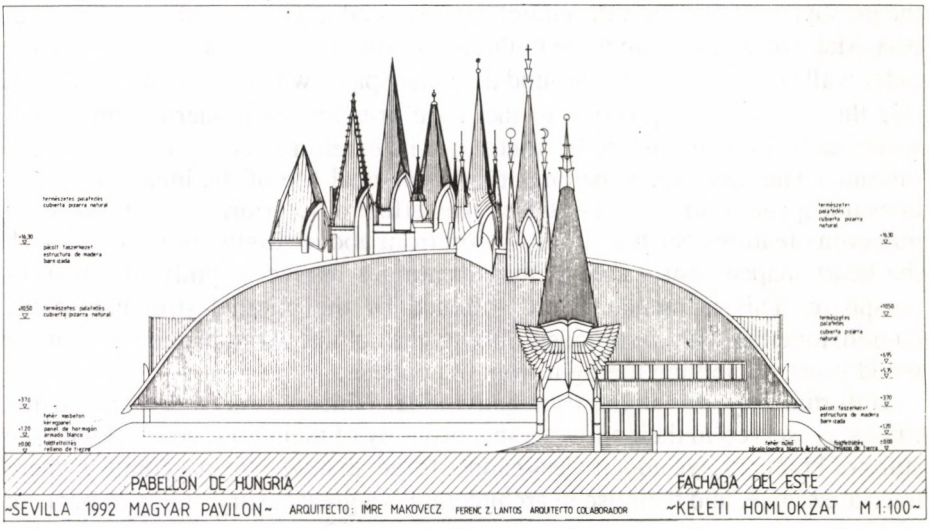
Imre Makovecz: R. C. Church in Paks. Façade and ground plan. 1987.

organic world is characteristic of decorative folk art, which explains his study of the magic latent in peasant art, whose obscure significance he wishes to evoke, and communicate via the building: an "instrument of communication."

His career has blossomed in the last thirty years, and the distinctive character of the early buildings has become mannered. Theory has come to power and become dogma. In place of the flexibility, facility of spirit, and irony of postmodern architecture, his ideas now cling to a rigid and narrow tradition.

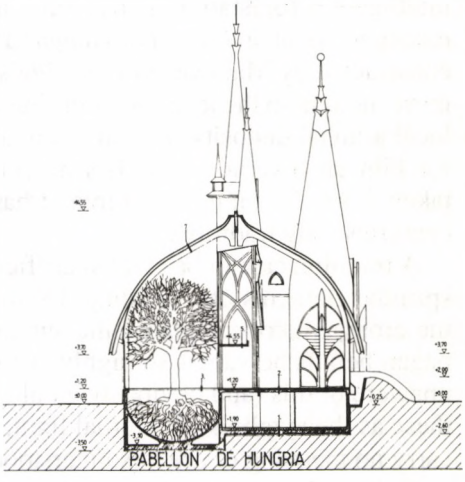
His main works of the recent past, on display at the exhibition, show this clearly. Their governing principle is a rejection of modernity; looking back in this attitude, he creates an idealized past which is not validated either by common or historical knowledge. The Siófok Lutheran Church (1986-87) was created for a resort town on the shores of Lake Balaton. The town, once endearing and intimate, has been destroyed by aggressive and hysterical development. Its piecemeal modernism has been accompanied by the tourist trade's infrastructure of low-quality services aimed at making a fast buck. And what does Makovecz set against all these buildings as a model to be followed? "Moving out (or escaping) from the centre of town on the main road, we catch a glimpse of a wing-eyed face of an old man with a high fur cap... Behind it are the pointed shoulders of his sheepskin cloak." This is a church à la Makovecz. The old man's mouth is the entrance, and the pointed shoulders of his cloak are the ends of the nave. "The old man looks out, but with his head drawn back, holding himself off from the materialist mentality of the rabble before him in the street." The problem is that this is not a feasible stance either in human conduct or in architecture. Can he seriously think that there is an ideal, wise, peasant way of thinking that can be translated into a building and set before the sinful (and ugly) town didactically, like a fable with its moral? Apart from expressing this primitive way of looking at things, the building is indeed like an illustration to a fairy tale. In this respect it is sympathetic or at least interesting, though its symbolic intent is somewhat demagogic.

The relationship between building and symbol is just as cloudy in the Hungarian Pavilion for the Seville World Fair (1991-92). The theme of the Fair was great explorations, an obvious reference to the discovery of America, whose fifth centennial it was. For Makovecz, the discovery of America represents genocide and the pillaging of the continent, with modern Europe built on the enormous booty taken from there. Of course, this cannot be denied and self-reproach has not been lacking in Spain itself. There is a tremendous price for any great discovery, and one may rightly ask what one is celebrating. But what does the Hungarian pavilion represent? Seven towers (with faces and eyes) represent the seven conquering Magyar tribal chieftains, the tree transplanted from the Gemenc forest to Seville, its roots visible under glass, represents the tree of life or, rather, the "tree of the world", which Hungarian pagan mythology associated with the three levels of the "Underworld-Present World-Afterworld." If I understand the architect's intentions correctly, the western, "Christian" world, with its devastating conquests, stands in contrast to a pagan people (the Hungarians), arrived from the east, creating their home-



Imre Makovecz: Seville World Fair. Hungarian Pavilion. East façade and cross section. 1992.

land. We have all studied history and know the significance of the Hungarian conquest and what a price was paid to maintain it. Most significant is that ties were formed with western Christianity and that the Hungarian kings cruelly settled accounts with paganism. Otherwise there could be no Hungarian state and the Hungarian people would have disintegrated and disappeared from the map of Europe like so many others. I doubt whether a building is capable of representing all this, or whether all of this may be read from it, but the pavilion is said to have met with great success, the bold joinery and bizarre forms are a sensation (the whole is entirely of timber). I am sure this is true, for if I have not been to Seville, I have been to Paks, to Makovecz's Catholic church, the Holy Spirit (built in 1987), which is powerful in its beauty. It is a generous structure, elegantly vaulted, whose inner space is intimate and friendly. Its anthropomorphic character—the nave rises over a heart-shaped form, like the human chest—is executed



sufficiently abstractly for the grotesque, unpleasant directness of the church at Siófok to be absent here. Of course, theory has its revenge here too: the building's less prominent eastern façade is completely unresolved and unpleasant, with the heart shape making a double rounded arch with the entrance to the sacristy and

the presbytery. Otherwise the church is truly conducive to worship and meditation. Makovecz understands the building as a two-walled structure in which the outer wall stands like a shell around the inner space, which is independent of it. (He thus stands in opposition to the basic principle of modern architecture, which calls for a building to be honest, for its exterior to be a projection of the interior.) The inner space belongs to the personal life of the inhabitants, and does not speak to the world outside. This effect of interiority is reinforced by numerous features, such as illumination from above. Light comes in through the heart-shaped roof window, thus creating a festive, slightly mystical atmosphere. This is mediated and softened by the internal structure of the church, together with the wooden ribbing, the colour, warmth, and smell of the wood itself, smoothing the light from the outside.

Unfortunately, this all has its negative side. While we may marvel at the tree trunks, preserved in their entirety, stripped only of their bark, covered with the stubs of branches, we nonetheless cannot forget that we live in a country where trees are scarce, and their use in architecture is a great luxury. (Only 16 per cent of Hungary's territory is forest, as opposed to 27-42 per cent of that of the surrounding countries'.) This is the only issue for which Makovecz's architecture and status have come under public criticism, particularly from the Greens. His response, that the uprooted trees can be more than compensated for by intelligent afforestation, is true only in theory, since there is no "intelligent" management of any sector of Hungarian agriculture. One thinks of the buildings constructed by Makovecz in the 1960s, less distorted by theory, when he gave more thought to the location of his buildings, and even built his walls out of the local alluvial deposits. The structure and its surroundings then truly exhibited for him an organic unity. His models for timber-architecture are generally taken from the Finns, but Finland has the necessary materials locally and a centuries-long tradition.

A tradition cannot be created artificially, either regarding the material or the spiritual elements of a building. On the steeples of the church at Paks, next to the cross, Makovecz places the sun and moon, a reference to the Hungarian pagan beliefs he values so highly. Those who attend the church, however, are unaware of this (and obviously would not accept it if they did), and so explain these as the symbols of "eternal light." The artificially created symbols either carry no meaning or are misunderstood.

György Csete (b. 1933) attempts to delve even more deeply into the past than Imre Makovecz. He ties his architecture to a supposed ancient art, the sun-cult of the pagan tribes of the steppes, and to the form of their dwelling, the yurt. If postmodern architecture is anti-modernist, then Csete is anti-civilization. He adds a national flavour to Rousseau's back to nature. He sees ancient Hungarian history as an unsullied Golden Age which was later destroyed by the influx of western civilization. (He dogmatizes this much more extensively than does Makovecz.) In his work, he rejects angular structures, such as those inherited from Greco-Roman culture, which he regards as foreign to the Hungarian tradition. Instead, he looks on arched roofing and circular ground plans to be

the exclusive features of natural, organic architecture. (He forgets, of course, that the cupola became general precisely under the Romans.) This ideology is expressed primarily in the commentaries and drawings that accompany these buildings and in the workshops he directs, in which he presents himself as a modern-age shaman. This shamanizing is highly artificial: the tradition he is trying to resuscitate has long been lost.

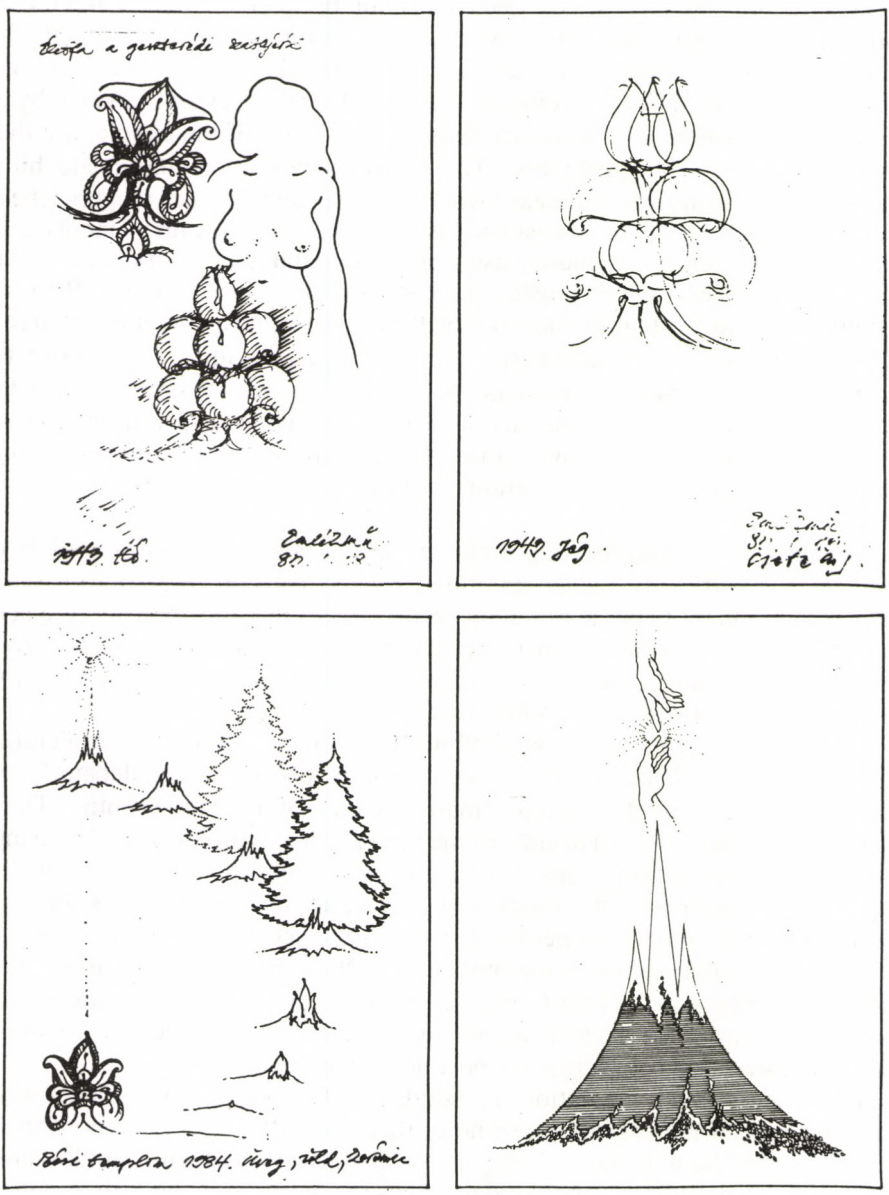
There is only the loosest possible connection between the theory and these buildings. One of Csete's main works, the Church of Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia (born a Hungarian princess) (Halásztelek, 1976) resembles a pagan cult site rather than a Catholic church. The church itself is a space covered by a cupola, under which, within the sixteen-cornered body of the cupola, are the parish office and the presbytery. The whole stands on a man-made hill, surrounded by a ramp much like earthworks, and the main entrance is approached over a wooden bridge. The lowest level is of concrete supporting elements and timber-covered brick, the church itself being a bound timber structure on an iron base, covered on the outside by copper sheets. The overall effect is extremely somber, with only the cross on the roof to indicate that it is a church, otherwise one could just as easily take it for a planetarium. The interior is ascetic and stern rather than intimate. Stylized golden sun-discs adorned with five white silk flags separate the sacristy from the church area. The illumination is beautiful, with a laterna covered in glass topping the cupola, opening onto the sky. Inside, on a summer evening under a clear sky, the stars look down on us.

Csete is a gifted and fetching architect, which is a weakness as well as a strength. The artificially created tradition, elevated to canonical status, restricts his thinking, and his belief in a "unique truth" leads him astray. Not every space is sacred, and we do not wish to be under the domination of the Sun-god forever. Both Makovecz and Csete lack the self-awareness and sense of irony so distinctive of postmodern architecture.

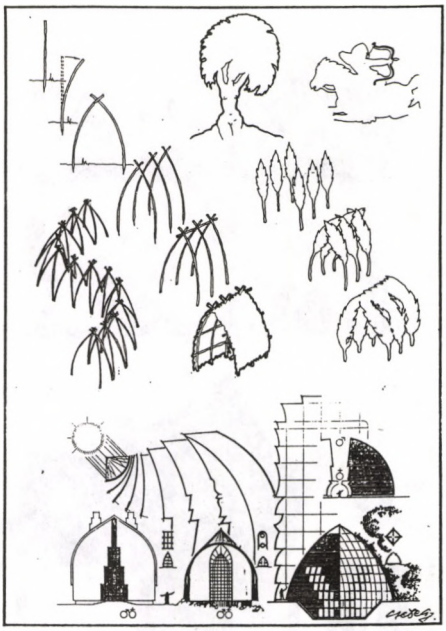
For nearly ten years, Csete worked in Pécs as the head of an architectural office called the "Pécs Group." They triggered off the "tulip debate," the stormiest architectural discussion in many decades, of the mid-seventies. They attempted (unsuccessfully) to enliven the barren, lifeless prefabricated housing estate at Paks with tulip-shaped structures and paintings on plaster. In the dogmatic atmosphere of the times, this was an act of such boldness that the party leadership could not tolerate it. They disbanded the office in the belief that this would put an end to the movement. Of course, the opposite was the case: the members of the Pécs Group dispersed all over the country, taking the spirit of the "movement" with them. Today, it is they who design the most bizarre constructions of Hungarian postmodern architecture.

As for the second generation, the students of Makovecz and Csete, who form the bulk of the exhibition, some of them are faithful followers of their masters, but without the latters' originality. Spaces covered with cupolas have proliferated on buildings, from kindergartens to commercial and office centres to crematoria, even if this emphasis on centrality, which conjures up images of

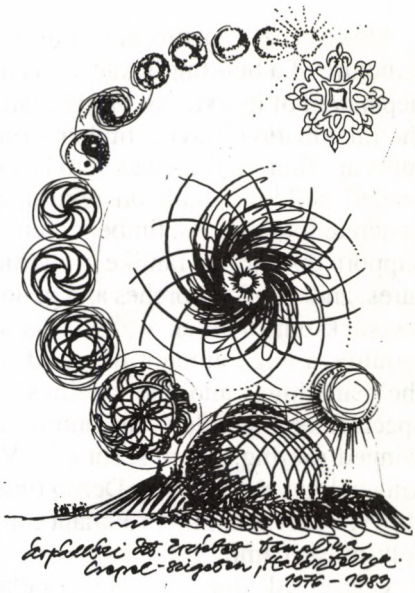
authority and power, is inappropriate to many types of building. This "ideological" architecture has opened the way for private mythologies. Carved timber Székely gates and grave-markers are in vogue (the latter in Lutheran and Unitarian cemeteries alike), adorned with dragons, moons, and suns—all part of a complex of symbols that has been constructed rather than reconstructed.



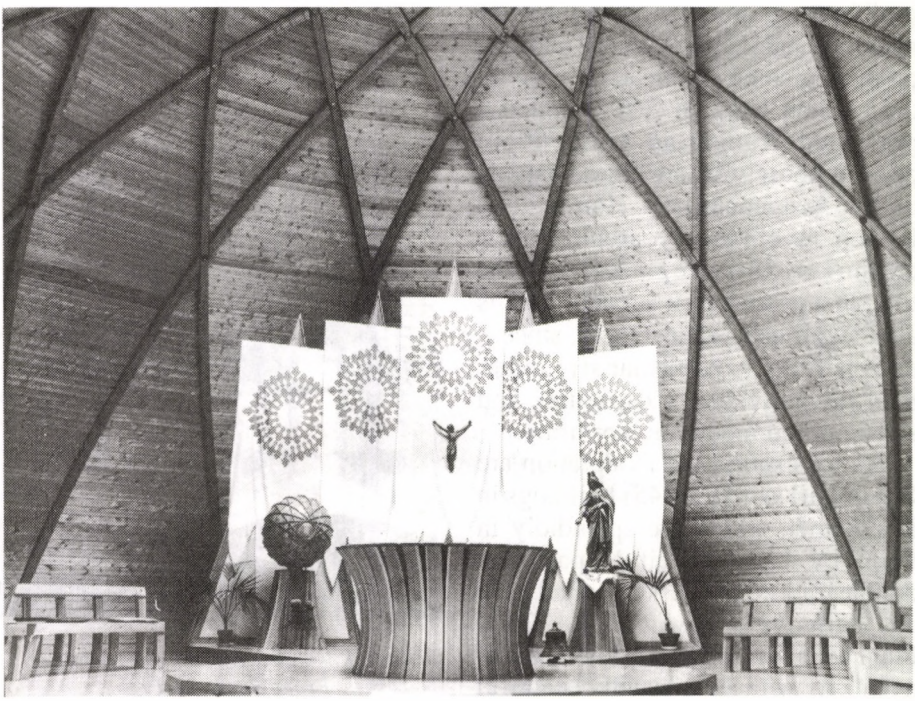
György Csete: Sketches, 1973–84.



György Csete: Sketches. Sprouts, bends, shelter, shell, heavens, vain—in Hungarian these words are either etymologically or onomatopoeically related. 1975–80.



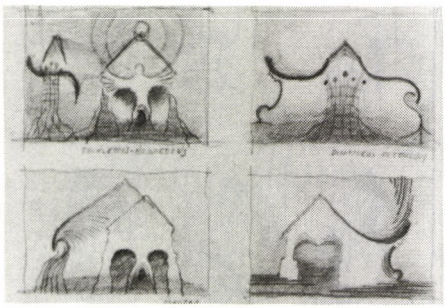
György Csete:
Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia R. C. Church, Halásztelek, 1976.
Sketch and interior with altar.

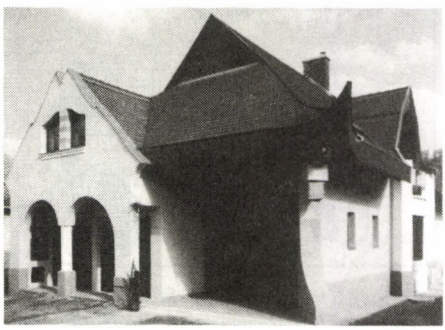


Makovecz's principle that the structure of a building's interior is independent of its exterior has liberated the imagination. Lavish timber structures are finding their way into brick-walled buildings built on reinforced concrete foundations, timber columns support distending fanlike rib-structures, and wooden porches and galleries stick out of brick walls. This all requires a huge amount of wood for the panelings, and the ceilings. A spectacular example is the enormous winged roofing, reminiscent of a Viking helmet, designed by Dezső Ekler (b. 1953) for a summer folkdance and folk-music camp.

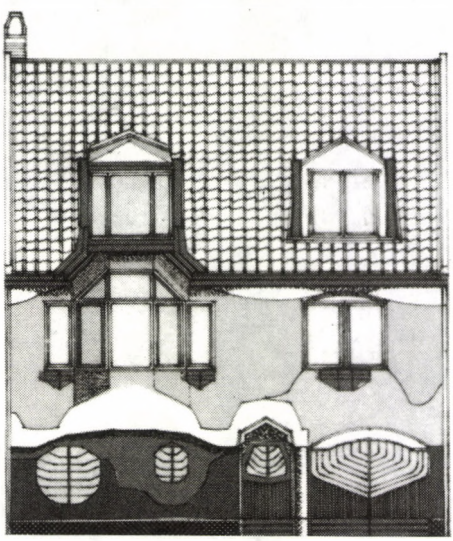
Undressed stone is also popular. Private houses like little fortifications are built on huge stone foundations, with bastions and roofs recalling the fantastical projects of the expressionists. An eclecticism without limits is proliferating, joining all manner of materials and shapes with one another, producing some architectural curiosities. Zoltán Rácz (b. 1957) united a porticoed Hungarian Great Plain peasant house with a Chinese pagoda in his Acupuncturist's House. It is French revolutionary architecture's dream—*architecture parlante*—come true, in a postmodern version. This is all a significant achievement, since it derives from no particular style other than an individual's capacities and self-imposed moderation or irony.

A nice example of moderation are Gábor Farkas's (b. 1945) buildings in Kecskemét, which are splendidly in harmony with the city's past and double tradition. Kecskemét had been an agricultural town on the Great Plain which around 1900 flowered into a real city with an unusually beautiful





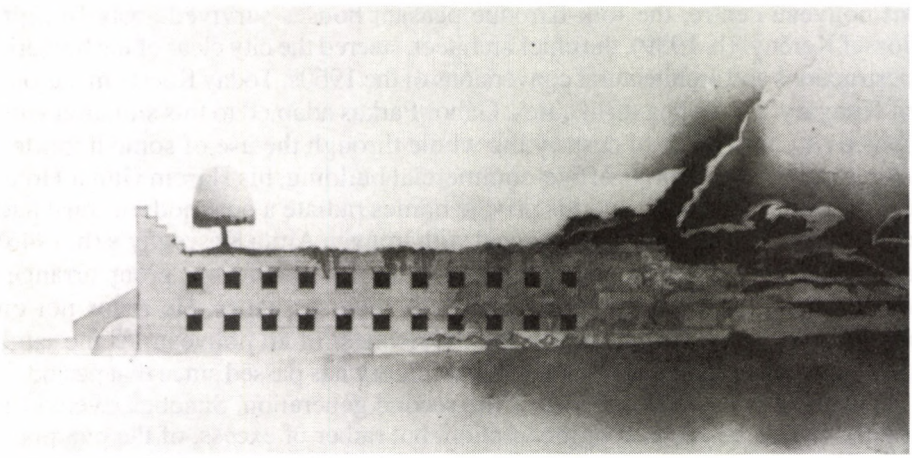
Zoltán Rácz: The house of the acupuncturist. Debrecen, 1984; Four sketches: encounter-meeting; dynamic equilibrium; Hungarian; Chinese.



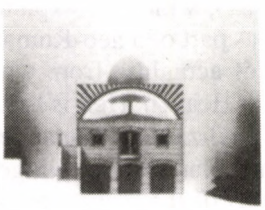
Attila Kőszeghy: Dwelling in Debrecen. Front elevation, 1985.

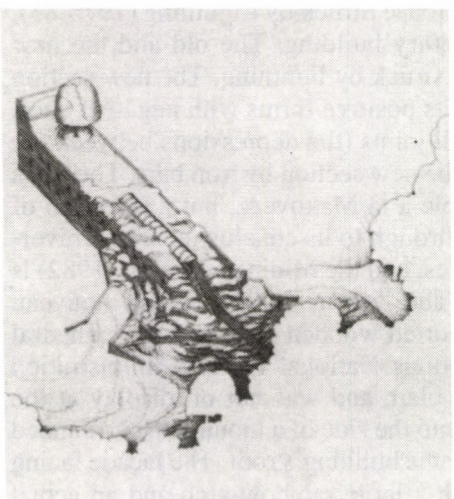
art nouveau centre, the folk-baroque peasant houses survived away from it. József Kerényi (b. 1939), the chief architect, steered the city clear of the barbaric destructions and architectural conversions of the 1960s. Today Kecskemét is one of Hungary's most beautiful cities. Gábor Farkas adapted to this situation with sensitivity, unwilling to destroy the whole through the use of some imported ideology. His residential-office-commercial building, his Három Gunár Hotel ("The Three Ganders") and his private homes radiate a postmodern spirit and couleur locale. This harmony is tinged with irony in Attila Kőszeghy's (b. 1946) apartment houses, postmodern versions of art nouveau forms, group arrangements, wavelike outlines and windows of diverse shapes. He relies not on mythology, but on formalization and the richness of art nouveau. At the same time, an acknowledgment is made that a century has passed since that period.

The most conspicuous figure of the second generation, Sándor Dévényi (b. 1948), cannot be accused of moderation, but rather of excess, of the overplaying of forms and concepts to the point of absurdity, which can only be understood as ironical. Dévényi, famous for his Zsolna majolica, lives in Pécs, and has made that city a centre of postmodernism. This necessarily entails the regrettable slow disappearance of street scenes so characteristic of one of the most beautiful country towns of the nineteenth century. He no longer operates in the folk-national vein of Makovecz and Csete, but draws on a much wider cultural spectrum. His three-story Zsolnay Teahouse (1981), which he explains as a symbol for the world in its entirety, was designed as part of a neo-Romanesque building. The middle level represents the world of actuality, from where we can look down at the lower level of Hell, and up at Heaven. Hell is held in the embrace of an enormous octopus, surrounded by the lizards of the underworld at its fringe. The real world is symbolized by the solar system: winged wild boars, who support the planets, separate the booths of the teahouse: between them are the constellations of the zodiac, while overhead the stars are visible in the vaults. Although this never got beyond the planning stage, his completed works are no less fantastical, such as the House Struck by Lightning (1978-85), built on the remains of a nineteenth-century building. The old and the new buildings are sharply distinguished, as if struck by lightning. The new section is a close mirroring of the old, matching its positive forms with negative ones, and vice versa. Thus for example the wall joints (the depressions between the bricks) on the old façade are matched in the new section by iron bars. The basis for his works is not an inflexible principle à la Makovecz, but a selection of ideas, each one of which is then carried through to its conclusion. The University Cellar Club (1979) is a system of caves, and the Mining Museum (1982) is modelled on a system of mineshafts. The "choir" inside his art nouveau Cathedral Restaurant (1987) is a three-storied wooden model of the cathedral of Pécs. His most interesting and ambitious National Parks Administration building (1982) was never more than a plan, and was not on display at the exhibition. The idea was to build it right into the side of a mountain, surrounded by a forest, whose plants would creep over the building's roof. The façade facing the city would be normal brick face with a large rainbow-arch and an actual



Sándor Dévényi: National Parks Administration Building (project). 1982.





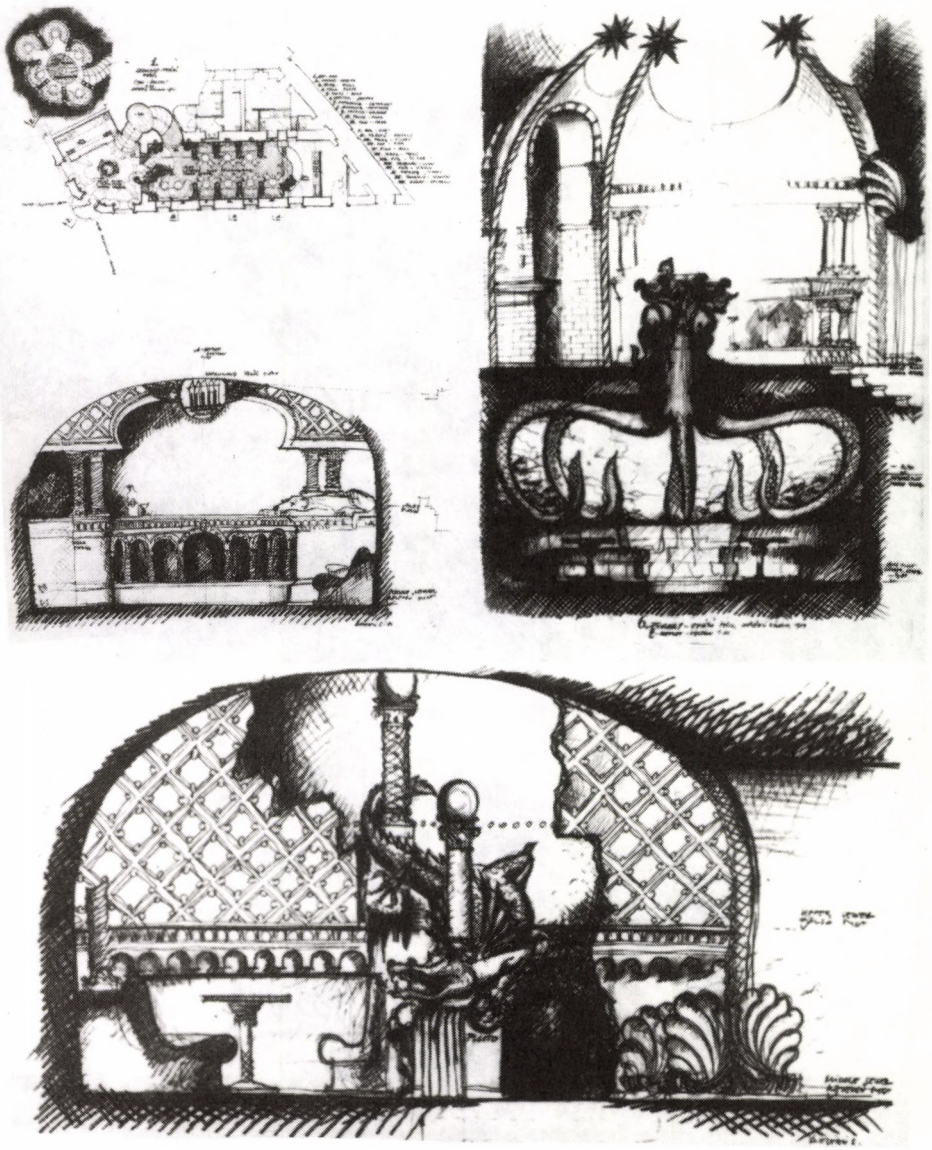
planted tree on the pediment. In the course of time plant life would completely swallow up the building. One can clearly feel the dilemma of the postmodern architect operating here, the recognition that the relationship between man and nature is irrevocably spoiled, so much so that "organic" architecture cannot compensate for this, either by theorizing or by mythologizing. Rather, the organism itself must be revived.

In addition to many other compelling circumstances, it was perhaps this realization which inspired Attila Kovács (b. 1951), one of the most gifted and imaginative members of this generation, to turn to the design of stage and film sets. In addition to the sets of some excellent Hungarian films (András Jeles's *Dream Brigade*), he has done large-scale designs, like his sets for the Turin Opera's production of the *Ring* (1986). Lately he has been working on so called "subject-statues" and architectural statues, though neither these nor his set designs were on view at the show.

Hungarian organic architecture has thus been extended in many direc-

tions, though the exhibition did not show all of these. The spirit of the founding fathers, which allows for belief but not for doubt, was much to be felt. While this assured the unity of the exhibition, it nonetheless did not inspire any intellectual adventure.

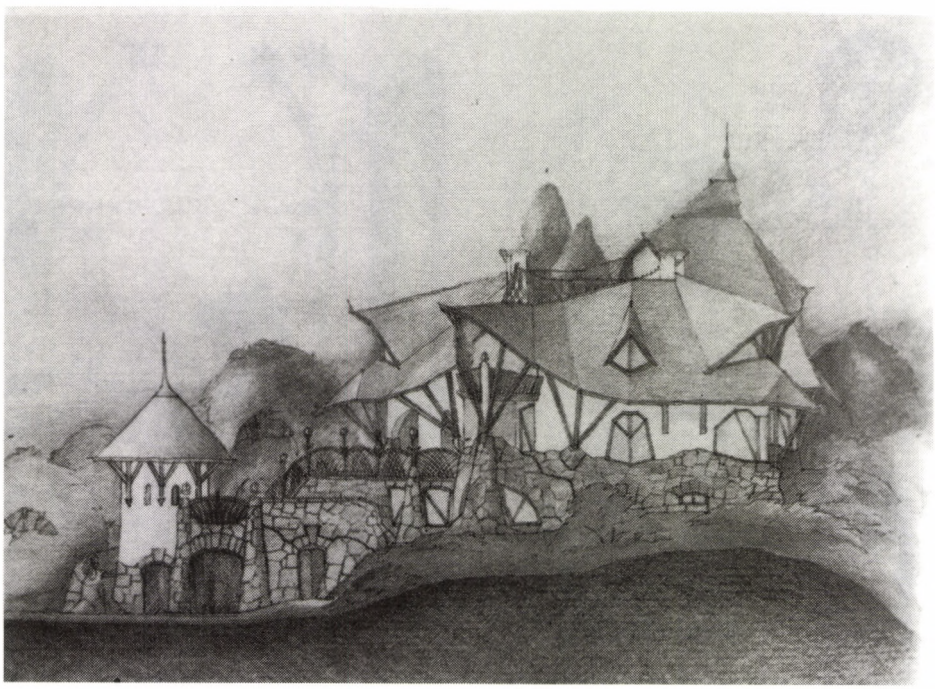
Indeed, the whole can be felt as rather excessive, an over-large slice of cream cake. The cupolas, spheres and conical forms, the zig-zagging and wavelike surfaces, the unending restlessness, the overcrowding, when all is

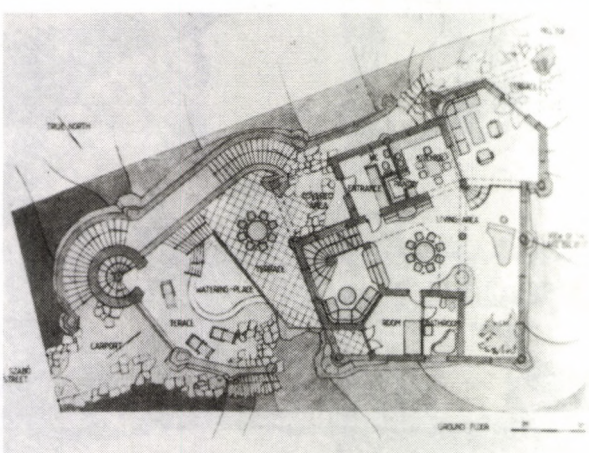


Sándor Dévényi: Zsolnay Tea House (project), 1981.

unexpected and there are no fixed points, is ultimately just as tiring as the monotony of prefabs.

One's eyes rested with pleasure on the walls of the Ernst Museum on the way out, and one thought with affection of that architect—hardly of great fame—who had found harmony between practical considerations and visual pleasure, security and surprise, the expected and the unexpected.





Ferenc Lőrincz: Design for a house in Fonyód. Ground plan and West elevation, 1991.

György Csepeli–Antal Örkény

From Unjust Equality to Just Inequality

The changes in Hungary and the other countries of Eastern Central Europe were preceded by a crisis in fundamental values, a crisis that is still going on. Feelings are being polarized in a manner that is virtually identical everywhere. The questions around which feelings are polarized are on who is or is not entitled to compensation for injuries suffered, on who is answerable for the wrongs and failures of the past, on who were guilty and who silently connived with the guilty, on who are to be rewarded or decorated for heroic resistance, on who shall have or how much is to be had of the property to be redistributed, and generally, on the principles and policy to be followed in shaping the moral and economic order.

The principles involved here are justice and injustice. Yet when conducting a comparative survey covering eleven countries in 1991, we found that people in all of the post-socialist countries (including the former Soviet Union) largely agreed to the statement that "there is no way of knowing what justice is." In the countries of the West, this position was adopted by a far smaller percentage. This difference seemed to be even more marked when the question put was whether the chances of eliminating social injustices and restoring the conditions of justice actually existed. The degree of passivity, incapacity and frustrated resignation is, virtually without exception, considerable in all the former socialist countries, the only exception being East Germany.

Public opinion in Hungary regarding both the above problems is conspicuous by its agnosticism and pessimism. Here we shall try to discuss the difficulty of an everyday interpretation of equity and inequity and ulterior viewpoints.

For citizens of already legitimate democracies, defining the nature of justice is not a simple task. It is easy to understand that the problem of justice appears in a different light when the hand of Justitia punishes, withholds material goods, and the value accorded to justice is psychologically quite different when the question concerns the distribution of goods, that is rewards. Of course, the two are interdependent, especially where material goods are concerned; owing to the scarcity of resources, we often can only give to some by depriving others.

The conflicts between distributive and retributive justice are inevitable because certain other values hidden within are in

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conflict from the outset. The more freedom and, with it, individual performance become the measure of justice, the more many may feel they are innocently handicapped. Even if compensation for social and personal handicaps is taken as a basis for justice, a mechanically equal distribution may violate the principle of distribution according to need. In this way equality comes into conflict with freedom; within equality there will be a conflict between need or egalitarianism.

It can be seen that these conflicts can in no way be reconciled at the theoretical level. Another important question is how social situations come about in which participants feel that things are basically in order, social justice prevails, or if it is violated, there is a mechanism for restoring it. During the formation of civil societies over many centuries, ideological and political institutions have developed which suit particular conceptions of justice and parties and political forces advocating their programmes, as well as various social institutions such as autonomous self-organized groups, local government, multi-party parliamentary democracy, constitutional courts, an independent judiciary, plebiscites, legitimate civil disobedience, legal stability. These make it possible for there to be a balance between opposing views within one political system, a coexistence reached by negotiation and compromise. The history of Western democracies can in the long run be described as a constant striving for equality, through a rapprochement that has always been accompanied by inequalities and their attendant conflicts.

The endemic political backwardness afflicting the societies of Central and Eastern Europe has been compounded by the ossification of inequalities and hence, serious political, social and economic injustices. The situation has only been aggravated by the fact that the legitimating institutions that ensure a sense of equity have only lately been established. Socialism offered unambiguous criteria for the definition of justice. It promised to eliminate inherited inequalities and to secure a perfect equality, under which each and every member of a socialist society would be able to enjoy the conditions of a full life: work, housing, leisure, culture, educational and health services. Moreover, this promise was not just made to the generations "building socialism"; it also held out the hope in general that, for the new generations, life would be on a higher and fuller level. Few of these promises have been fulfilled.

A whole series of surveys indicated clearly that the population did not consider socialism to be just. Curiously enough, both those who benefited and those who were disadvantaged by it complained about injustices. Socialism achieved an "equality of injustice". For some reason or other, nearly every individual living under socialism found his own situation and chances unfair. The explanation for this was the enduring shortage of services, which ultimately destroyed the whole political and economic structure of socialism. Scarcity of goods was inevitable since firms' incomes depended not on performance, but on whether they were favoured by the central authorities or not. Their desire for growth did not come up against serious difficulties. Since no rewards accompanied production of desired goods, there was no reason to produce them. Paradoxically, shortages went hand in hand with waste.

At the same time, the experience of inequality was not coupled with the possibility of remedying injustices. Socialist society, being very different from that of a constitutional state, did not offer the means which a citizen could employ to regain his integral justice. The citizen was then reduced to impotent resignation and grumbling. Another equally obvious solution was evasion of stern and frequently changing laws, in consequence of which theft, embezzlement, corruption and fraud were rampant. Often

what was considered as an offence in the eyes of the authorities (possession of hard currency), was rated as a virtue by the public. The roles of offenders and victims were confused, and in the absence of public discussion of the aspects of justice, the appropriate patterns and attitudes were non-existent. For these three reasons the common experience of inequality did not lead to common action but instead to a situation where those who could cheat, did so with the approval of the majority.

Now that the social formation called socialism has disappeared from the scene, the contentment at its disappearance has given way to confusion and disappointment (See Table 1). The government parties in Hungary took the right road when they resolved to restore equity. But they did not reckon with the fact that the concept of equity formulated on a moral level while aimed at retribution, i.e. at deprivation of rights and privileges, could not meet with a positive response. The social atmosphere created in the course of the past four decades makes this impossible. This we may interpret as an anomie inherited from Kádárism, as the weakening of society's sense of equality, but it is something more basic. Distribution based on the huge public debt and not on profitable production ultimately guaranteed security to everybody. A particular comfort of the system was that, despite poor personal performance, it guaranteed jobs, health services, inexpensive cultural and leisure facilities, cheap public transport. Although a sense of inequity was felt by all, state care covering almost all aspects of life, with the egalitarian notion of equity that lay behind it, was taken for granted.

This assumption of a right to these benefits and an accompanying feeling of

TABLE 1
Agnosticism and fatalism

It is useless to engage in debate on social justice, since there is no way of changing what exists.

	Number of respondants	Percentage
Fully agree	308	32.9
Agree	139	14.9
Yes and no	197	21.1
Would rather not agree	142	15.2
Do not agree at all	149	15.9
No response = 65	935	100.0

As things stand now, there is no way of knowing what is just.

	Number of cases	Percentage
Wholly agree	480	51.4
Agree	158	16.9
Yes and no	159	17.0
Would rather not agree	67	7.2
Do not agree at all	69	7.4
No response = 67	933	99.9

(Source: International survey of social justice-perception, 1991.)

deprivation of justice was not affected by religious belief. We found that for both believers and non-believers alike, there was an identical proportion of those who did not believe that a just system can be created. Nor did religious belief affect responses as to whether or not justice can be defined (See Table 2). Consequently, moral rhetoric cannot in principle expect considerable support from those describing their religious beliefs as firm.

This survey, conducted in 1991, demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of respondents from the former socialist countries, 90 per cent in some instances, essentially expected the same benefits from the post-socialist state as from its predecessor: free health care, housing for young people, safeguarding the real value of pensions, removal of striking inequalities. This international survey depicts a Europe divided by a wall of ideas. On the eastern side of this wall, a decisive majority expects the state to guarantee employment for all who want it, a limit to incomes and no excessive differences in wealth. On the Western side of the wall, citizens look far less to the state to reduce disadvantages arising from social inequalities, even in a country like the Netherlands, with its highly developed sociopolitical institutions (free education, all-inclusive social insurance, high unemployment benefits, retraining subsidized by the state, family allowances).

In this situation, a post-socialist state can choose between two rational alternatives: to begin with, it can undertake to satisfy paternalistic and egalitarian expectations. The risk in this case is not negligible, since, labouring under inherited debts and without resources, sociopolitically

TABLE 2

It is useless to engage in debate on social justice, since there is no way of changing what exists.

	Agree	Yes and no	Don't agree	No.
Non-believers or non-churchgoers	45.9	21.2	32.9	717
Catholics	53.9	19.7	26.3	152
Calvinists	55.0	17.5	27.5	40
Other faiths	53.8	30.8	15.4	26
Number of respondents	447	197	291	935
Percentage	47.8	21.1	31.1	100.0

No response = 65

As things stand now, there is no way of knowing what is just.

	Agree	Yes and no	Don't agree	No.
Non-believers or non- churchgoers	67.6	17.0	15.4	712
Catholics	69.9	19.2	10.9	156
Calvinists	76.9	15.4	7.7	39
Other faiths	69.2	7.7	23.1	26

(Source: International survey of social justice-perception, 1991.)

motivated redistribution may be possible only by restricting freedom and strengthening the machinery of the state.

The strong and provident state is therefore unfeasible. The other alternative is a weak state, self-limiting its proper sphere of competence. The withdrawal of the state can be followed by self-organization, the formation of self-help alternatives, education for civic rights, and the creation of institutions which could increase the strength of society by dynamizing the economy and making it fit for European integration. In this case the crystallizing of well defined political programmes around the differing conceptions of equity can get underway. These programmes and their sponsors would make clear the conflicts between interests, which necessarily proclaim different values of justice. Thereafter it would be possible for a discussion to start in which the moral and politico-ideological aspects of justice could be separated; within the latter it could become clear what can be promised to those who have lost by the transition from socialism, and what duties shall devolve on those who have gained in the process.

It can be taken for granted that this conflict is no simple one but that it can at least be kept within the limits of political rationality. The condition for this is the emancipation of the citizen in the legal sense, and this primarily means political and economic rights. Following this, a truly modern political and ideological discussion will be able to get under way where social-democratic ideals are ranged on one side and liberal values of justice on the other. We cannot believe that a process of clarification is promoted if either the ethico-religious arguments or the ethnocentric system of arguments rooted in Eastern European history are entangled in the problems of equity.

In this situation, the viable strata within society are still operating the survival techniques that have proved themselves in recent decades. These involve a cat-and-mouse game between the state and its nationals. Economists estimate that about half of the national income escapes taxation. Each measure tightening tax regulations brings with it tax evasion. If, for example, in the interest of protecting the newly commenced domestic manufacture of cars, a limit is set to the number of vehicles private firms can import annually, then the number of cars imported by private persons will increase. If income-taxes are raised, individuals tend to set up companies designed to show a deficit on paper. The growth and dynamism of this micro-economic sphere, impenetrable to the state, might be more pleasing if behind it were not ranged the same thinking and suspicions of the political system as in the past.

In the former socialist countries post-socialist change has so far taken place mostly in the symbolic ideological sphere. The change has brought about results in the pluralization and democratization of political institutions. Hungary is favourably distinguished by the fact that it has been here that the reshaping of the economy has got off to the best start. But the sad conclusion is that the crisis in values has so far proved to be continuing both in Hungary and in the other countries.

Our survey has demonstrated that in Hungary, just as in the other socialist countries of Eastern Europe, a modernization of the value system is long in coming, and even the germ of a new meritocratic ethic has not come into being—this could hardly have developed within two years. The egalitarian ethic, even though dysfunctionally, is still very much alive. People attribute ever increasing impoverishment partly to unfair distribution, partly to the poor themselves, who are seen as lazy, irresponsible, drunkards (See Table 3). Seeing others becoming wealthy is nowhere a decisive experience, and the small number of the

rich are viewed all the more suspiciously, and moral condemnation of them is widespread. There is also a view which explains enrichment by the development of the market economy. But the trouble with this explanation is that the respondents look on the market economy—or the way it is in process of being created in Hungary—with suspicion and think that too much monopoly and state arbitrariness is needed for success and enrichment in the market economy for it to be fair (See Table 4).

The big question of the future is whether post-socialist society, having renounced the earlier ideal of equality, will accept the view that inequalities can be just. When people experience that the way leading them is not exclusively through birth but through study, enterprise, talent and creativeness, and at the same time see also that individual destiny, taken as a function of one's own accomplishment, implies both personal advance and failure, the standard of which is not loyalty to the executive power, then we can say that the real transition has set in: the socialist utopia has come to an end.

TABLE 3
The causes of poverty in Hungary, as respondents saw it.

	Percentage of those answering (very frequent or frequent causes)
Want of ability and talent	47
Want of luck	31
Loose morals or alcoholism	75
Want of personal effort	33
Prejudice of social discrimination	28
Lack of equal chances	56
Unjust economic system	70

(Source: International survey of social justice–perception, 1991.)

TABLE 4
The reasons for wealth as seen by respondents in Hungary

	Percentage of those answering (very frequent or frequent causes)
Ability and talent	63
Luck	44
Uninhibitedness	69
Hard work	38
Social connections	72
Advantages of social origin	66
Unjust advantages offered by the economic system	54

(Source: International survey of social justice-perception, 1991.)

Tibor Kuczi—Ágnes Vajda

Privatization and the Second Economy

Black market to market

Privatization in standard journalese means the passing into private hands of state property. There is, however, a broader use of the term, denoting private property gaining ground over state property; here privatization signifies the partly directed and partly spontaneous process of establishing a private economy.[1] In view of this latter interpretation, it may be reasonably asked whether there have been any preliminaries to privatization, or if the recently started privatization of state property means the actual beginning of the process.

The question (albeit in a different form) is by no means a new one. Over the last twenty to thirty years a section of the population of Hungary has made continuous efforts to (re-)take property into private hands, there to exploit it according to a logic different from government thinking.

Our answer will be affirmative though rather hesitantly so—bordering even on the negative at times.

In the past the second economy was about the only source for the hope that the state would be unable to bring every option under its control and that there was opportunity for independent action. It was good to know that, against the wishes of our rulers, there was a second economy existing alongside the redistributive official economy, and that it was guided by calculation and rational response to the environment.

Now, however, with the public demand for the principle of private property turning into an economic fact, and with privatization a project currently being undertaken by the state, we see the second economy in a different light. It has lost the poignancy of opposition and, indeed, even the evident rationality of its existence. (Really, is it still there at all?) It had a meaning in the era of the

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planned economy—can it be discussed in the context of a market economy as well?

What can the market economy now, in the process of formation, inherit from the (past?) second economy? There is no clear answer. We still do not know whether a modern market will come into being here, or will interpersonal relations continue to link the turnover of goods to privileges, corruption and monopoly, with only the source of legitimacy changing as property privileges replace political ones. An answer will be provided by future events. We can rest assured, however, that a market, regulated by supply and demand, requires talents on the part of participants in the second economy different from those they have to display in a market based on monopolies. Economic rationality may be of advantage in the one case, the political arithmetic of economic advantages and disadvantages in the other.

However things turn out to be, it is worth taking account of what aspects of the second economy may influence our present. What shall we inherit from this least damnable part of our mixed heritage?

First is the "personnel" of the second economy. Many of the early entrepreneurs and agricultural small producers are still pursuing their goals in the private economy and, in so doing, are involving fairly large numbers of their own immediate families in that sphere too.

Second must come capital, just when its scarcity is loudly lamented. One example is the considerable number of villages that changed in the 1970s and '80s. Alongside new houses, hundreds of thousands of workshops, barns, sheds were built and rotary cultivators, tractors, incubators came into productive use; in the garages, basements, cellars, even on the balconies of city flats, a breathtaking number of tiny shops and workshops were established.

Finally, there are certain entrepreneurial behaviour patterns that have remained from the inter-war period and some other such patterns have been transformed and reorganized in the circumstances of the second economy. Thus we have a choice of private ownership behaviour patterns at our disposal today.

Let us first examine all this in the two pioneering successful branches of the economy in the former regime: small private farming and private housing.

Agricultural small production

This is the most widely exploited area of the second economy, with 1.5 million small producers in the 3.8 million households in Hungary. The extent of participation and the composition of participants can be seen in time-budget surveys; these show that, for instance, over a third of Hungary's adult population worked at least one day per year in such production. Year in, year out, that proportion was stubbornly repeated like a well-established and deeply rooted folk custom (the discrepancy between the 1977 and 1987 data is only 1 per cent). There are, nevertheless, some considerable changes hidden within

that repetition, as the proportions of men and women have turned around, with the predominance of women in the agricultural small production of a decade ago giving way to that of men. (In the year 1987, 40 per cent of men engaged in "farming around the house".[2] That is no random occurrence necessitated by harvesting, as the number of men working in the peak summer season is not much higher than that of those working in "leaner" seasons.) The mass participation of men, overturning the predominance of women, signifies improvement in the opportunities to make money.

The bulk of those working on household plots is made up of people linked with agriculture through their main jobs. Most live in villages and are no longer young.

Thus we have a core of established village folk, but there is also a relatively large number of town dwellers and/or young people who derive a supplementary income through regular or temporary involvement in agriculture. The high proportion of them is principally the result of the poor technical level of this form of production: traditional tools and, especially, human labour are what it is based on. The relative abundance of food in the immediate past was the result of a great deal of manual labour. Although Hungarians have come closer to the European average for consumption of the main foodstuffs (meat, milk), the price paid is in the preservation of some backward methods in agriculture.

Agriculture in Hungary split in two in the late 1960s. Large-scale farming was modernized through relatively speedy mechanization. Family-based work was replaced by organizational forms that were supposed to be modern at the time; traditional peasant skills were squeezed out, in the top jobs at least, by specialist qualifications. (The economic and social costs of this process are another question.) In contrast, small-scale production maintained its vigour partly because a great majority of farmers retained and continued to use their traditional tools and buildings. Their skills, at least as regards the immediate "technical" aspects of farming, remained within traditional limits. Even the organization and distribution of work naturally devolved on the ready-made forms at their disposal. A considerable proportion of small producers invested only minimal amounts; their buildings and equipment remained on the technical level of sixty to eighty years ago. The idea of small farming was often inspired by the existing but long abandoned sites: animal pens and stables inherited from parents and grandparents. Only a tenth of all small farms have unequivocally broken with traditions through a drive to modernize.[3]

It was in this way that small production was forced to remain unmodernized while exploiting its traditional character as a resource. Its very existence and adaptability were frequently due to a lack of economic calculation (no one checked on labour expanded); it could rely on the traditional family structure (thus women were sometimes under the exclusive authority of the head of the family, even giving up jobs to play a traditional female role if that was in the interest of the farm); the family's own consumption patterns were not emancipated, often being fully subordinate to the demands of producing, so that no distinction was made between the household and the farm; child labour was

used occasionally or regularly, though not in the form met in developing countries, since minors here were employed fully within the family and were not paid wages).

The archaic forms of realizing interests (ranging from imitating loyalty to imitating work) also contributed to maintaining the functioning of small farms; such an adaptation to the capricious circumstances of buying and procurement (which often depended on the whim of officials) included tolerance of minor cheating or injustices, or their compensation by "counter-cheating". Collective realization of interests was substituted by a multitude of minor and basically asymmetric agreements.

In fact, small agricultural production was not an absolutely traditional affair. In contrasting it sharply with large-scale farming, it is our intention to make clear an opposition which does in fact exist. In reality, the material and behavioural aspects of farming had as their background a particular combination of the opportunities that the first and second economies provided.

The past decades saw a variety of ways in which people adapted to the economy of shortages. Almost all small farms thus acquired some machinery in the 1970s and '80s. Thousands of home–made rotary hoes and small tractors were in use; countless local variations were developed. Genuine grass-roots production took place; in some villages even tractors were produced through such local technologies as were made possible by the "obtainability" of some parts from nearby factories. There were people to regularly supply those parts and others to alter them for the new function. The different local types of small tractors are monuments to the hard-won possibilities and inventiveness of an area's small producers.

No doubt, much that pointed to the material and behavioural renewal of enterprises was produced and accumulated. This collective ingenuity and inventiveness expressed itself in the force field of tradition and modernization: it was here that it acquired that variety of forms which must be taken into consideration, even in the privatization drive that is now taking place. It remains to be seen how this half traditional, half modern world will function. A likely development seems to be that of the traditional side of small farming remaining a serious resource; families will now replace large-scale organizations as the pivot of farm work; in some branches, the rebirth of skills buried under large organizations will be considered as economically rational solutions (e.g. in traditional wine-making areas).

The family-level organization of labour has proved profitable not only in food production. It has also transformed the character of villages and small towns. A considerable proportion of the incomes produced by this kind of small production was materialized in housing.

The ratio of private housing has steadily risen in recent decades. An important resource for this was private construction. According to 1970s and '80s data, the volume of private projects within the shrinking set of new housing declined at a considerably slower rate than that of state projects. In the early 1970s, two-thirds of all housing construction was private, a proportion that grew to over ninety per cent in 1989. By 1990 the state had ceased to build houses altogether.[4] (Private construction was also hit by the crisis.)

According to our calculations, 432 million hours were spent on housing construction (and renovation) in 1987, two thirds on new building, one third on repairs—all worked outside normal working hours. That is 83 per cent of total working hours in the building industry. According to estimates, some 900,000 people worked annually in erecting and maintaining houses. This means that ten times as many people in the second economy worked five times as much as those in the state construction industry.[5]

Just as in the case of small-scale farming, private housing construction involves people of the most widely diverse professions, albeit with a major difference. The bulk of small farms are owned by less prosperous, aging people whose main work is in agriculture anyway. The participation in construction work on the other hand cannot usually be connected to social position: middle managers or village school masters are just as active in building their own homes as blue collar workers. The very nature of the economy of shortages, however, puts those working in the construction industry in a more favourable position in utilizing their skills, their connections and their special access to materials and goods.

Though we have no reliable data on the social composition of families living in homes of different qualities, available information allows us to state that families' incomes and the quality of their homes are more or less independent of each other. Events of the last decades in agriculture and housing construction show many similarities. In the latter there also occurred a split. The state-run construction industry was modernized, taking on some technologies and organizational forms that were considered up-to-date at the time. The expertise traditionally necessary for building a house (three or four crafts) was replaced by a range of highly specialized skills (thirty to forty occupations). But where materials, machinery and organizational forms were concerned, private housing construction remained an established activity. The folk institution of friends and relatives helping to build each other's homes was the most common way of acquiring labour.[6]

The state-run construction industry forced its clients to move into small, crowded, uniform apartments, while private construction provided for larger houses, many of several storeys. Thus evolved the paradoxical situation in which the modern part of the housing supply, homes meeting the demand of the last third of the century, were produced by unmodernized private builders whose chief resource was their adherence to tradition. Thus the same process

took place here as in agriculture: quality demands were met by private enterprise, even though those involved were at a disadvantage compared to state-run or co-operative economic units as regards material supply, techniques applied and availability of credit. Quality housing, fruit and primeurs were made available by the second economy.

The above arguments hint at tradition and modernity being even more relative in housing construction than in small farming production. In fact, private housing construction is also a special combination of opportunities offered by the first and second economies. A couple of examples will help to make this clearer.

In the Hajdúság area of Eastern Hungary, small or large numbers of relatives set out for a wood to obtain the timber needed for construction. They spend a few days cutting trees there and, after paying for the laughably cheap timber, organized a similarly cheap way of transporting the timber home. An agricultural cooperative provides its members with transport at a discount for special occasions such as moving or construction.

Another good example of people adapting themselves to the economy of shortages is the "access charts" produced in villages whose inhabitants therefore did not have to make the usual round of the material stores when they needed bricks, crushed stone, timber, cement or a tub for a construction. They relied on the community's daily updated knowledge of what was available where. This collective knowledge included information on the most advantageous ways of purchasing, to such minute details as who to turn to in need, how to bribe whom, and what means of transport were legally and illegally available.

These two examples are perhaps sufficient to illustrate how the adaptation to the "socialist environment" created a colourful range of private and collective skills. The capitalizing power of private homebuilders was their success in blending the energies of the traditional family and clan organization, their individual adaptation skills (survivor mentality), and advantages provided by the badly managed first economy (negligent controls and work-absenteeism).

There were relatively large social groups that had an opportunity to combine in some way advantages of the first and second economies, of tradition and modernity. Except for the elderly and the very poor, all sections of society strove to improve their housing conditions. Increasing opportunities to make money in the 1970s had the natural effect of raising the quality of housing. Building a home was also the most natural way of accumulating wealth.

Surrounded by a garden and outbuildings, a house provided a measure of independence for its inhabitants, a means of self-supply and something to fall back on if it were necessary to make ends meet. In either favourable or desperate conditions, it could house an enterprise of some sort. With unemployment looming, for example, many miners, who had the appropriate cellars in the county of Baranya, started growing mushrooms.

The real significance of houses and outbuildings with gardens (their real economic potential) cannot as yet be evaluated in figures.

Similarly, we have scant data on the use of privately owned homes for non-

residential purposes. One possible source is the estimate made of undeclared incomes: one estimate claims that approximately a third of the estimated total private income of 136-156 billion forints earned in 1985 originated from the turnover or rental of real estate.[7] Another source is the 1988 and '89 income tax declarations made by individuals. There were a total of 4,708 million such declarations submitted; 7,536 and 7,106 people declared income from selling real estate, 82,082 and 89,348 from renting theirs.[8]

The increasing economic importance of the turnover in real estate is visible everywhere. Scanning newspaper advertisements gives the impression that the turnover of housing for non-residential purposes has become more intense in the last couple of years, as many houses and apartments are offered for use as offices, shops, doctors' surgeries, etc. One might well venture to say that part of the housing stock has been or is being transformed into productive property. Consciously or unconsciously, the participants of the former second economy were betting on a political change.

A common characteristic of agricultural small production and private homebuilding and utilization is that they are basically organized within the framework of the family and are a transition between a household and an enterprise. In response to an unfavourable economic situation in the past, they retreated into the security of self-supply. Yet, when some better opportunities were offered or unemployment shut the doors on any other way of earning a living (the use of the present tense would be more appropriate here), the two have been there to provide the basis of an enterprise. The house and its garden, the farm buildings served to "hold" the family's surplus income in reserve, or even to produce surplus income.

Artisans, retail trade, partnership

According to data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of entrepreneurs (individuals and members of economic partnerships) in 1990 was over 230,000, or 5.3 per cent of the active population.[9] Other figures give their number at twice that.[10] Whichever is correct, the proportion is not too high, even though nowhere and never in the history of socialism had the private sector reached even those levels. The rockbottom year was 1960, when no more than 2.5 per cent of the labour force worked as artisans or private retailers. In the late 1970s there occurred some improvement with the rise in demand (yet private artisans were licensed even then only to provide services, though most of them managed to fiddle their way through such barriers, as participants in the second economy classically should).

The decisive turn in the development of the private sector took place in the wake of a series of government measures taken in the early 1980s. Some new legal entrepreneurial forms were introduced to augment independent artisans and retailers, and these induced a jump in the number of those working in that sphere; their social composition changed and the range of the activities pursued

also widened. The essentially traditional private sector typical of the 1960s and '70s was replaced by a more modern one: enterprises started operating within a more modern organizational and legal framework, with qualified people streaming in. This renewed private sector is one of the resources for privatization.

The year 1988 brought about another turn for private enterprise. By September 1990, there were over sixteen thousand economic partnerships registered as legal entities, most of them in the form of limited companies.

The constantly rising number of those working in the independent sector approached the half million mark in 1990. That growth rate signifies that the enterprise had become a (somewhat limited) promised land from the year 1982 on. The accelerated spreading of various kinds of partnerships and companies made possible by the new laws hinted at some highly unusual prospects emerging. Handicrafts were also on the rise with a new breed of artisans that has emerged in recent years. Qualified people with wide connections and professional experience have become owners of those small shops and workshops that used to be scorned (perhaps even by these very people). In the 1970s, an engineer artisan was considered peculiar: the only explanation for his decision to become an entrepreneur was personal necessity of some kind. Ten years later, however, the ambitious engineer, out to fulfil his talents (and make a fortune), is no longer a Don Quixote figure. Graduates tried their hands in the private sphere; so did those with a *gimnázium* education—though skilled workers were in the majority. People without appropriate training or skills have little opportunity to find a place in these enterprises: their ratio in the private is much lower than in the state-run sphere.[11]

The increasing attraction of the private sphere can also be seen in the fact that members of deprived social groups are being gradually squeezed out. Women, the young and the elderly, and the uneducated are being left out of the process of redistributing and modifying the opportunities introduced in Hungarian society by the enterprises of the 1980s.[12]

Our research shows that the less well-to-do have as little hope of improving their incomes through becoming entrepreneurs as women and the uneducated have. Independence is mostly chosen by those who already possess fully furnished houses, homes, and cars. Hardly any newcomers venture into the entrepreneurial field simply to solve their basic financial problems.

So those who became independent in the 1980s had better than average opportunities to succeed. Conversely, the strength of the private sphere is shown by the fact that it attracted those whose "make-it capital", the ability to choose between lifestyles, was considerable anyway.

The prestige of the private sphere has undoubtedly grown in the last ten years. Other data also indicate that private enterprise has become serious enough to command respect. A recent survey found that a quarter of all city dwellers regarded the possiblity of going private as realistic. Characteristically enough, nearly two-thirds of them were men. The acceptance of the idea of turning private was (similarly to entrepreneurs, though not quite so strictly)

decisively influenced by the subjects' educational level and financial situation.[13]

In short: social position binds the desire and interpretation of situations containing the idea of becoming independent almost as firmly as it does the realization itself.

The general recognition of enterprise was also borne out by the results when the above survey was repeated in 1990: 44 per cent of those questioned thought they would be glad to become entrepreneurs. Roughly the same number considered the dominance of private property in the economy as desirable, while a third indicated the primacy of state-owned property.[14]

Finally, prestige surveys also point to the respect gained by private entrepreneurs. In the years 1983 to 1988, the weight of those occupying the upper levels of the state and Communist Party hierarchy diminished, while that of the independent participants in the economy grew.[15] However, no hasty conclusions should be drawn from these data: an indication of increasing prestige alone does not mean a definite recognition of enterprise by the population. Small artisans and retail traders were in third place (after intellectuals and managers) on the basis of wealth, but only sixth on that of social usefulness. (They were preceded even by skilled workers and agricultural entrepreneurs.) All this indicates that it is not the actual entrepreneurial activity (organizational and innovative skills, risk-taking, competition on the market, etc.) that people accept as the source of prestige, but high incomes.

Not all kinds of entrepreneurs contributed identically to enhancing the attractiveness of independence. The private sphere is strongly divided.

A major type of entrepreneurs is traditional in character. People here have run their small shops for a decade or longer. They do not aim at growth, are not interested in becoming capitalists (a third of them are planning some minor enlargement), yet they cling to their independence. Their families (neighbourhood connections) have distinguished importance in their enterprises. This group's social profile can be easily drawn: it is made up of the elderly and the less educated.

The last decade saw some rapid changes in the composition of artisans and retailers. Lately a third of them are replaced annually, a development which reduces the number of the traditional entrepreneurs described above and boosts that of younger ones (who have acquired their skills with state-run companies). Typically, they have completed secondary school. Only the future will tell whether they will end up as traditional entrepreneurs in the service sector or become major entrepreneurs. (41 per cent of them want to expand their businesses.)

(Street vendors, a brand-new group of retailers, have also appeared in the last two years. Little is known about them, albeit they should not be ignored in any discussion of privatization.)

Another main group within the private sphere is made up of those who have accidentally drifted into entrepreneurship. They are mostly members of partnerships: they only want the venture to "pay well" and, when disappointed,

they move on if they can, not necessarily to another private enterprise. Their social composition strongly resembles that of the urban employees (although, inappropriate education is a hindrance there, too). Events in the next few years may have a dramatic impact on this type. A minority may become true entrepreneurs, but the majority are likely to revert to being employees.

There is a third main type, consisting of "real" entrepreneurs: directors of small cooperatives, specialized groups' managers and, even the executives of limited companies. Their economic behaviour corresponds the most closely to the public's ideal on the rules of desirable behaviour in a market economy: they are dynamic and rational, aiming at expansion.[16] They constitute the core of would-be medium and large capitalists. They are educated, some 40 to 50 per cent with university degrees. They are the breed that had made it, even before arriving in private enterprise. Their careers resemble those of the managers called "powersavers" (beneficiaries of the previous system who transformed their political into economic power in the final months before the change). They turned their earlier cooperatives or specialized groups into private enterprises (though there are, of course, exceptions, as a number of small cooperatives are newly founded rather than transformed), and made use of their well-established capital of personal connections. Even foreign relations are not a rarity within that group: in the years 1986 through 1988 (before restrictions on foreign travel were entirely lifted) a fifth of all small cooperative managers travelled to the West several times a year. (Less than a tenth of small artisans and traders did so.)[17]

On balance, there seems to be cause for satisfaction; the prospects for privatization in Hungary are good. Private enterprise has attracted not only the most suitable people, those willing to take risks, but also those with the best individual qualifications. Here knowledge, the only kind of capital that seemed to be usable in the past decades, was invested and marketed. What economists have so frequently spoken of in the last twenty years has finally come to pass, their much trumpeted thesis and appeal that the level of education should be raised, for this is what has a crucial bearing on the country's economic potential. Hungary's entrepreneurs (almost) stand comparison with the level of education among those in the US, Japan or Sweden.

The private sphere's mental skills are actually greater than indicated by qualification data. In the 1980s (when enterprises began to receive the green light) it was those with above average skills and experience who applied for artisan's licences and founded what were legally termed as economic cooperation societies; our survey informs us that they had gained ten to fifteen years of experience by then. Thus a kind of natural selection took place among those with identical qualifications; the best-qualified, professionally ambitious, experienced employees were the first to abandon state-run companies and try their hands in the private sphere.

At the same time, common sense warns us that above average education does not necessarily mean above average quality of product. The entry of those

with good secondary and university qualifications into the enterprise world has not, at least so far, brought about renewal in any industry. A fine example is the rise in the proportion in the retail trade of those with such qualifications, without any visible improvement in customer service, in packaging and so forth; in short, there has been no "civilizational" change in the retail trade. Private boutiques have fought their way down to the level of state-run department stores, or often even below that level, owing to their crowded selling space and the consequent lack of presentation—not to mention the frequent rudeness and unrealistic prices to be encountered in them.

The situation is similar in other fields as well. As we have described, there has been a constant change of guard in handicrafts, with secondary school certificates becoming characteristic here as well. Yet, no renewal has taken place.

It is among small organizations that the concentration of knowledge is the most spectacular. Several economic cooperation societies and industrial small cooperatives were organized to become professional supergroups, yet very few of even these are capable of using knowledge as a genuine capital. In a frequent practice, computer technicians and engineers joined to form a small enterprise to sell cheap home electronics, home audio and PCs; when business falters, they turn to selling coffee and T-shirts (which have a steady market, as every street vendor knows) rather than to innovation.

Everywhere we look tells us that a large concentration of qualifications and professional experience took place within the enterprise sphere in the 1980s. Nevertheless, this re-location of knowledge has not yet triggered a rise in the output of entrepreneurs.

The reason seems to be simple enough: in a transitory period when the legal and market situations are uncertain, possession of the knowledge that allows production and technological problems to be solved is not in itself enough. It is just as necessary to have the kind of knowledge that helps to balance the "insufficiencies" of the circumstances. With no ready-made patterns or well-established and acquirable procedures at his disposal, an entrepreneur is often forced to find new ways of performing even relatively simple tasks. We lack an unambiguous system of rules for the basis of economic practice. Even today there is still too much individual licensing, too many roundabout practices and economic and legal twilight zones. The observance of even those rules that do exist is also questionable: it is enough to mention only the problems of taxation. This also lacks an acceptable, annually repeated system that makes clear what observing and breaching the rules mean. The risks and gains in tax evasion cannot be calculated at all.

(A passing note: contrary to widespread belief, there are no unlimited opportunities where there is no tradition of enterprise, for action is strictly regulated by everyday limitations. Entrepreneurs must engage in the battle of creating and defending the conditions for their operations and keep finding themselves in special situations in which they have no tried and trusted routine for solving problems. Consequently solutions must be improvized, and much

that is, strictly speaking, outside their actual businesses has to be faced up to. Such conditions are of advantage to conmen rather than to businessmen.)

Certainly, the last ten years have not passed without a trace. There has been a slow accumulation of knowledge. Those becoming independent today need not start from scratch every time, for some solutions and procedures are now public property. This entrepreneurial knowledge was not, however, born under market conditions: much of it is a bag of tricks that once helped get round the limited opportunities or customs and tax rules. Such knowledge will become superfluous in the hoped-for enterprise-friendly economic environment. Of course, we cannot vouch for the independents themselves pining for such an environment in all sincerity, for their talents in picking their way through the jungle of the old system represents a vast capital to them. A buyers' market is the pet idea of economists rather than entrepreneurs.

The second economy was born and grew in opposition to the first, contributing to its dissolution to a great extent. The second economy's survival was, however, a matter of adapting as much as opposition. The two spheres of the economy were intertwined as well as separated, the capital and knowledge established in the second economy was of real functional value only in a medium of shortage and bureaucratic coordination. Thus, if the first economy collapses, it will also bring down part of the second: the special knowledge of a detailed cosmography of the economy of shortage will be lost, but the talent of general adaptation, however modified, may be reborn in the environment of a market economy.

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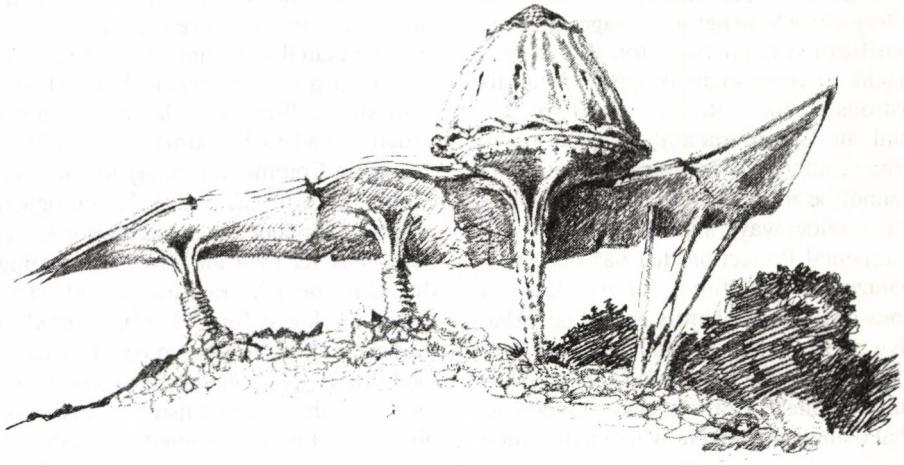

Anna Várkonyi

A Catalogue of Woe: the Environment

Environmental protection unfortunately did not benefit from a tendency evident in the communist system to copy much that was fashionable in the West. As the year 2000 approaches, Hungary, in addition to its economic and social problems, is facing grave enviromental problems.

The region is flooded with obsolete cars spewing far more pollutants than their Western counterparts. In the absence of market incentives, socialist heavy industry was untouched by any ecology-conscious structural change. Several times as much energy than should be is being used by individual industrial and agricultural consumers. Water mains are laid down everywhere long before sewage and water purification is provided for. The state of health of Hungarians is approaching disastrous levels. Yet, since 1976 we have had an Environmental Protection Act which, although looking good on paper, cannot be implemented (currently a new one is under way), and a Ministry of Environmental Protection that has been reorganized several times for political reasons—and is thus hardly able to put effective pressure on the government. Since 1972, Hungary has signed all important international environmental agreements, that being just about how far environmental protection in a communist country could go.

The political change created false illusions in environmentalists as well, especially in Hungary, where the waves of ecological protest against the Bős (Gabcikovo)-Nagymaros barrage system had finally brought all the democratic opposition under one banner. Those who used to chant environmentalist slogans together are now members of different parties, supporting the government or the opposition, and they now seem incapable of furthering the cause of environmental protection. The Gabcikovo-Nagymaros affair is also in a worse state than two years ago. Since then, intricate and tactical politicking has been going on. An environmentalist technical solution was sought in a context where both Slovak domestic politics and the international situation had to be borne in mind. The European Community, ready to enter the examination of the project's ecological aspects as independent international experts, has its own anxieties concerning the Danube-Rhine-Main canal. The Slovak biologist Juraj Holcik retorted to the argument that it would be a pity to let the billions spent on Gabcikovo go down the drain, that communism had also cost billions, yet no one wanted to finish that job. At the time of writing, in May 1992, the Hungarian Parliament has at last unilaterally terminated the contract.

Parliament, however, is in a legislative frenzy, forcing those representatives wanting to speak on environmentalist is-

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sues to wait until the closing hour of almost every session. There has been hardly any media coverage of the work of the Parliamentary Environmental Protection Committee.

The public is still occupied with reorganizing itself. Though there exist some remarkable movements and non-government organizations, methods of exerting pressure have not yet crystallized: we are still waiting for the citizens' broadside.

Communism continuously denied the region that driving force which is provided by the synergistic effect of the necessity for technical modernization combined with the simultaneous growth of green movements. That absent force in Eastern Europe could be made present making environmentalism an integral part of economic modernization, with Western capital playing a major role. Hungary's associated membership of the European Community entails some duties in that respect and may compel the provision of appropriate guarantees in the long run. The Western world is aware of its own interest in promoting environmentalism. Some support comes through World Bank loans and the PHARE aid project, even though these are far from being the well-coordinated environmental Marshall aid programme that is needed. That is a pipe dream in the context of the very real danger of Hungary importing technologies and products that no longer meet Western environmental standards, especially since we have neither the laws nor the institutions to block them.

An energy system on a set course

The information revolution of the 1970s triggered structural change in the industrialized countries, creating large-scale unemployment and an oil crisis. At that time Hungary raised loans abroad to finance outdated industrial production. That had the single benefit of postponing the advent of unemployment for twenty years. Another surge of energy wastage was set off when Hungary completely misunderstood the first international oil price explosion, began to increase production of low-quality domestic fuels, and boosted energy-producing capacities instead of saving energy as the West did. In this way a large number of energy-guzzling and highly polluting plants were kept alive. What is worse, many of them are located close to each other. Inhuman conditions are to be found in the regions thus formed. No former socialist country has to date published figures of the number of unemployed who used to work in highly health-damaging conditions. With unemployment hitting the poorest regions hardest, a thorough analysis of such data might ease the feeling of hopelessness to some extent. Material and energy-saving programmes, as well as tax and credit benefits helped counteract pollution with end-of-pipe solutions in many obsolete industrial plants, many of which have now been closed down, making much of that investment a dead loss.

In consequence of the cavalier energy policy that lacked ideas and ignored the energy crisis, Hungary's energy system also found itself on a set course.

As much as 60 per cent of energy consumption is covered by imports that are mostly one-sided and, worse, tie Hungary to former Soviet sources. Last year Hungary consumed approximately 20m tons of coal, 2m of which were imported. Half of that was coking coal for metallurgy, the rest household coal. About three quarters of the oil consumed is imported. To supplement the annual domestic production of 1.9m tons, 5.1 to 5.3m tons flow in via the Friendship and Adria pipelines, which have so far complemented each other in the present political chaos. Hungary consumes 11bn cubic metres of natural gas annually, 5.2bn of which is locally produced, the rest being imported from the C.I.S. The country consumes 11bn KWH of electric energy,

of which the C.I.S. supplied 6-7bn last year, a mere 16 per cent. To rid herself of such dependence, Hungary has started constructing facilities that will hook up with the West European energy grid, a project likely to be completed in 1995.

Western capital would be instrumental in creating the technical conditions for Hungary linking with that grid. However, uncertain ownership and the still unclear system of calculating charges (in which energy prices for household consumption are lower than the dues paid by producers, who thus cross-finance consumption) still put off much-awaited foreign investors.

The power stations of the Hungarian Electricity Company provide 97 per cent of the electric energy produced in Hungary. (The rest is produced by industrial power stations.) Almost half of Hungary's total energy is provided by the 1,760MW output of the Paks nuclear plant. It is not a Chernobyl-type plant, fortunately, the compressed-water reactor's safety system corresponds to Western standards, but the plant will not be developed further. Though the French nuclear lobby smells a splendid business opportunity in Paks, a decision to develop Paks would concentrate too much of Hungary's electricity production on one site and one form of energy and add further complications to the international problem of nuclear waste disposal.

Most of the rest of the country's electricity is produced by outdated plants using lignite and oil. Though the steep decline in industrial production has meant that the power plants now emit far less sulphur dioxide, dust and soot, the strict international measures likely to come in effect in 1993 will nevertheless force Hungary to modernize many such plants.

The struggle between different lobbies is delaying the government's energy policy decisions. The advocates of nuclear, lignite and steam turbine power stations continue to battle it out with each other while it is increasingly clear that energy saving and efficiency might open up immense resources. To produce one unit of GDP, Hungary uses twice the amount of the energy used by any of the industrialized market economies. The demands of environmentalism would be best met by energy saving and efficiency. However, there are neither legal nor economic regulators to encourage such behaviour.

The current energy situation allows Hungary to postpone a decision on building or rejecting a huge basic power plant until the turn of the century. If the country finds itself needing to increase capacity before then, the least harmful (and relatively cheap) solution is an easy-to-install steam turbine station. The first steam turbine block will soon start running at the Danube Power Plant.

Hungarian agriculture, which employs 18 per cent of the active population, started some increasingly intensive production processes in the early '70s. These involved a rise in the use of energy, artificial fertilizers and pesticides. By the mid' 70s Hungary's consumption of artificial fertilizers had exceeded the average level in the European Community. Despite timid efforts to introduce environmental methods, no Hungarian government so far has attempted to encourage non-chemical agriculture, fearing a decline in production. The conditions for ecological agriculture are far more advantageous in Hungary than elsewhere in Europe, yet there are only 16 major farms engaged in organic farming, mostly for export. In 1991 Hungarian agricultural exports reached a new high. As all the European Community members are also food exporters, high quality produce is a must. Food quality is controlled at twenty sites in the country. Five instrument centres have been established on World Bank money and one with PHARE aid. The centres' computers are linked to the European Community's information system.

A food register which is in use in member countries is already being translated.

Troubled waters

Some of the most spectacular errors of the past forty years are manifest distortions in the settlement structure. The ill-famed National Plan of Regional Development sentenced hundreds of villages to a withering death. People, denied their educational and medical services and local administration, naturally moved to towns: many to the outer reaches of the Budapest agglomeration, the lucky ones ending up in Budapest proper, in high-rise housing projects. Those who could, saved up and bought tiny plots of ground outside, and choke the roads weekends, travelling to and fro in search of fresh air. The latest is for people to flee the newly depressed areas, swelling the number of jobless and homeless in Budapest, sleeping rough and raiding dustbins for food.

Most of the environmental problems in housing areas stem from the fact that developers failed to realize that people would travel and produce sewage and garbage. Most of the inhuman Budapest housing projects would have been unnecessary if the equivalent of their cost had been spent on developing the infrastructure of the towns and villages outside Budapest, building water mains and sewers, electricity and telephone lines, roads and transport systems. As a result of their absence, Budapest has become a congested, polluted, painful sore.

Public utilities were generally lopsided, owing to the mistaken approach of the water authority which always provided water mains before laying down sewers. The gap between the two appears to be getting smaller. A national sewerage programme is being drawn up at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Water Conservancy. According to this, 60 per cent (3.5 million cu.m./day) of the 6.0 million cu.m./day total capacity of the country's waterworks will be biologically cleansed sewage water by the year 2010. Of the current total of 3.35 million cu. m. drinking water, 2.4 million cu.m. ends up as untreated sewage, only 1.0 million cu.m. that is, 40 per cent of the total being biologically cleansed. The situation in Budapest is even worse. Of the 1.0 million cu.m. sewage produced, only 214,000 cu.m. (21 per cent) is passed into the Danube in a biologically cleansed state.

Urban garbage disposal is generally of an acceptable quality. However, there are 2,500 village garbage dumps that accord with neither environmental, nor public health regulations. Garbage is regularly collected from every home in Budapest, but only half the households outside the capital are in the same happy state. Selective collection, a condition for recycling, is still at the planning stage.

Local administrations are handicapped by uncertainty. The Local Administrations Act fails to adequately regulate local administration property or its management, nor does the Act provide for a free property market. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development intends to correct these shortcomings by a new bill on regional development. The environmental authorities wish to do away with multiple disadvantages (Budapest and villages, between different regions, etc.) at the same time as coordinating social, environmental and economic interests. The financing of such projects is, however, rather doubtful. All that can be said with certainty is that last year the government allotted 1.5bn forints to depressed areas.

Of Hungary's natural resources, her soil is economically the most valuable, with 88 per cent of the country's territory being arable, and three quarters of this being actually tilled. Half of that land is subjected to, or threatened by, acidification, erosion, alkalinity, flooding and too high a

By the waters of Balaton

For a time it was possible for adiscreet silence to be kept. But when tons of dead eels a day began to be washed ashore or into the picturesque reeds, Hungarians and foreign visitors alike fled from the 200 kilometres of shoreline surrounding the "Hungarian sea". Owing to its unusually shallow waters (average depth: 3 metres), Lake Balaton is extremely vulnerable to ecological damage, and the delicate balance is paid least heed to by those whose livelihood depends on the lake.

"The tourist industry seizes on those sites where road, forest and water meet, then fills them with spa-hotels, boutiques, restaurants, brothels, and golf courses, and what is finally left by the leading industry in the national economy in the areas thus explored is manure, garbage and exhaust fumes. Tourism grabs the profits without leaving a penny for the forest and water that provide the attraction of the area and the profits of tourism." The words of a parliamentary deputy, a representative of the ruling coalition, on the occasion of a visit late last year by the Parliamentary Commission for Environmental Protection. At long last the attention of parliament was drawn to the lake's plight through the sheer volume of eels that had perished. Since then, a number of measures have been taken to save Lake Balaton.

Some experts had warned of the dangers looming over the lake as early as the mid-1960s: they were discouraged from airing their grim findings. As a mark of relative socialist prosperity in Hungary, private motoring was gaining ground, and an increasing number of weekend plots were being allocated in order to placate people only too happy to flee the intolerable huge housing estates (one of the achievements of "socialist" architecture) and return to the bosom of Mother Nature. Later, they could get no closer than "near" the water, since the stock of available lakeside plots had run out. For those without lakeside plots, even approaching the shore was becoming a problem. This triggered the establishment of new promenades and free beaches by building embankments along the waterfront before the weekend plots, at some places cutting down the reeds so that as many as one and a half million could spend their weekends there in the main season.

Polluted every day by hundreds of litres of suntan oil (coupled with agricultural chemicals), in the absence of sewers, and with most of the reed acting as its water-table. Air pollution is a considerable factor in soil pollution, which is being made worse by sulphuric, nitrogenous and phosphorous compounds, synthetic organic materials and tracer elements. Garbage dumping on either illegal or environmentally and hygienically unfit village dumps is a real time bomb. Industrial sewage and waste pollute the water table. Lead from vehicle exhausts pollutes agricultural products. Surveys made after the withdrawal of Soviet troops show that their sojourn here created 60bn forints' worth of damage to arable land, the soil, plants and animals. The budget has set aside 1bn forints to cover the most urgent costs in that respect. (However, no one has so far surveyed pollution created by Hungarian forces.)

natural filter lost and finally girdled by concrete, the lake could endure only so much without severe damage. Several cases of fish perishing *en masse* signalled that something was amiss, so a multimillion forint project was set up by the government in the mid-1980s to stop and reverse the lake's decline. Agrobusiness stockraising was reformed along more eco-friendly lines: lakeside settlements were provided with sewage systems so that not even treated sewage now flows into the lake: the use of agricultural chemicals was banned in the immediate vicinity of the lake, and there has been an effort to avoid agricultural techniques leading to erosion wherever the soil could be washed into the lake. Nevertheless, half the buildings around the lake are not connected to the sewage system, which is just as well, since some of the treatment plants in the area do not have the capacity to handle the peak tourist season anyway. Mosquito repellents, sprayed from aeroplanes, are suspected to have caused one of the most recent series of fish catastrophes. All the same, the money spent on the project has borne fruit, as the Minister of Environmental Protection demonstrated on television in the year 1988 by drinking the lake's water. This he did, however, in the middle of the lake, at a safe distance from the public beaches where the nitrate and suntan oil content of the water is measurably higher. Uncivilized swimmers are not to be blamed: there are too few public toilets (and many of the existing ones are in an intolerable state) on a number of cheap beaches, which proves the point made by the deputy referred to above.

Though we have won a battle, we still have a good chance of losing the war to save Lake Balaton, for many utilizers still only consider their own interests as they contribute to the pollution of the lake. The outrage of the environmental parliamentary commission stopped short of demanding that the stocking of imported fish species (especially eel) in Lake Balaton should be stopped. The eel stock is going to be highly depleted next year, even more so as large quantities are being fished right now. It is worth noting that the Balaton Fisheries refuse to spend a penny on the lake which is the source of its income.

If the lake's cause remains well-publicized, if quality tourism replaces mass tourism, i.e., if fewer visitors were to spend more and if, under a tax system more logical than today's, some of the income of those exploiting the lake is spent on preserving it, we may hope that the mass perishing of fish will cease and that our grandchildren may enjoy the velvety waters of Lake Balaton.

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Of Hungary's surface waters, 94 per cent have their sources abroad, and there is less and less of it. As the water proceeds through the country, quality increasingly deteriorates. Phosphate, nitrate and ammonium content is rising. The deterioration of the quality of Hungarian rivers started in the 19th century (owing to the regulation of rivers and the concrete river beds built as flood control) and it has not yet stopped. The rivers' capacity to process waste, garbage and nutritive materials has been damaged: in effect, they have become huge nitrate canals. If the process is not stopped in time, the water table and riverside drinking water bases will turn into an undrinkable nitrate coctail. The solution lies

in channelling, biological and (if necessary) chemical water cleansing, less or no artificial fertilizers, less pollution from the atmosphere. Half the drinking water in Hungary comes from the water table, its quality is therefore a strategic consideration. The water table under towns and villages (at depths of up to 66 feet) is so polluted by nitrates that it is unsuitable for drinking. Since karst water supplies are diminished by mining and their quality is deteriorating for all the above reasons, 600-700 towns and villages in Hungary have no drinking water of satisfactory quality. Drinking water is sold in plastic bags or delivered by water-carts. It is small consolation that only one per cent of the population live in the affected territories.

Lake Balaton deserves a paragraph of its own. The deterioration of water quality may have been stopped, but no improvement can be expected. The lake, Hungary's chief tourist attraction, is the victim of ruthless exploitation. Fishing (last summer 400 tons of eels died of an infection harmless to man, but in point of fact the true cause was the lake's ecologically unfit condition), agriculture and the catering industry all try to make as much money out of the lake as they can, without spending any money on the lake itself. True, no organizational investment framework has been established as yet. For the moment a tug-of-war is going on among the environmental, agricultural and water conservancy departments as well as local government units, with the ownership of the lake at stake. But even if representatives of ministries, local government and Parliament could create the appropriate institutional framework for the future of Lake Balaton, they would be unable to get rid of the rundown week-end shacks, the "achievements" of socialism, crowded on tiny lakeside plots. The lake's condition might be improved by sewers and sewage treatment, proper water conservancy and some self-restraint by fisheries and agriculture.

The air is even worse off than the waters, even though the country is in the European mid-table as regards background pollution. Half the atmospheric sulphur and nitrogen compounds coming down on Hungarian territory originate in Czecho-Slovakia, the former GDR, Poland and Italy. A third of Hungarian emitted air pollutants remain in the counry and half fall on neighbouring countries. In several industrial towns, the combined effect of industrial emission, motoring and heating, produces a concentration of cancerogenic organic compounds of 2 to 4 times the admissible levels. Organic pollution on the busiest roads in Budapest is over five times the North American standard. The inhabitants of Mártírok útja, a busy Budapest thoroughfare, have organized an environmentalist movement to protest against lead pollution. Mothers anxious over their children's exposure to lead poisoning, have to date staged several demonstrations. Their worries are substantiated by a public health survey conducted two years ago, showing that the blood of adults in Budapest's densely populated central areas contained slightly more lead than that of those in suburban districts—but children's blood in central areas contained a shocking amount of lead compared to suburban children. (The difference was 0.8 μg-dl in men, 2.1 μg-dl in women and 17.2 μg-dl in children.) Since early this year, leaded petrol has been a lead content of 0.15 grammes per litre, which corresponds to European standards. Even though their ratio is still small, the number of cars equipped with catalyzers and running on unleaded petrol is on the rise, a process encouraged by customs and taxation incentives.

As a result of overwork, unhealthy nutrition and a polluted environment, the disease and mortality rates of the middle-aged in Hungary are among the worst in Europe. The life expectancy of men has not risen since 1970, remaining at 65 years. That of women has risen from 72

The air we breathe in Budapest

Coming into Budapest by plane, you may well spot a pink glassy bell over the city: smog. Should you drive into town from the airport in bad weather, your nose will also be affected. Smog. Increasingly it is city traffic and not industry that is the cause of smog. While industry is responsible for approximately 40 per cent, heating for 20 per cent and transport for another 40 per cent of the average air pollution nationwide, a Budapest survey financed by the PHARE project maintains that transport is to be blamed for 98 per cent of the carbon monoxide (causing breathing difficulties and heart problems), 97 per cent of the petrol and diesel oil products (causing cancer), 93 per cent of the nitrogen oxides (causing cancer and respiratory diseases as well as irritating the mucous membranes), 60 per cent of the sulphur dioxide (similar effects) and 97 per cent of the lead (harmful to the brain and impeding the development of bones) in the air. Though the inhabitants attribute the city's bad air to smoke-belching buses, the large number of obsolete, two-stroke vehicles and the heavy traffic passing through the city (East-West transit traffic skirts the city centre and will do so until the first section of the Budapest ring road is completed in 1994); in point of fact 82 per cent of the traffic-generated carbon monoxide, 93 per cent of hydrocarbons, 84 per cent of lead, 31 per cent of formaldehyde (also causing cancer) and 43 per cent of nitrogen oxides find their way to people's lungs from the exhaust pipes of passenger cars.

Hungary leads the world in cancer-related deaths per one thousand men (as regards women, we take 3rd place among 50 countries). In lung cancer, Hungarian men take 6th, women 13th place. In neighbouring Austria, 68 of 100,000 inhabitants died of lung cancer in 1977 and 64 in 1988, while the figures in Hungary rose from 65 to 88. As locals have been exposed to increasing levels of air pollution since childhood, their resistance is weakening speedily. Over twice as many men of 40 to 60 years of age die of lung cancer today than did 20 years ago.

Residents of Hamburg pollute their air less than the people of Budapest, even though they have 50 per cent more cars. Last year's slight improvement in Hungary was due less to the city administration than to other factors. Within a year and a half, petrol prices have surged to world market level which, coupled with rising taxes, has noticeably reduced people's prospensity to drive. Leaving the car at home is facilitated by the public transport system, which is the envy of many visitors from abroad. Again, without any initiative from the city administration, the oil industry has this year reduced the lead content of petrol from 0.4 grammes per litre to 0.15. Some minor tax benefits are aimed, though with limited success so far, to encourage the fitting of catalyzers into even old cars.

The city administration might counter vehicle-caused smog by organizing transport more efficiently. The most lively policy debates in City Hall include a further sharp rise in public transport fares and the projected new bridge that, in the view of its opponents, would bring the traffic of a crowded outer thoroughfare too close to the city centre. However, the 1996 World Fair to be held in Budapest will need at least one new bridge—and the one proposed seems to be the most feasible solution.

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to 74 years. The three leading causes of death are cardiovascular complaints, tumours, accidents, and suicides. Of the environmental factors, air pollution damages health to the largest extent. This can be seen in the fact that 44.5 per cent of the population live in polluted and 30 per cent in heavily polluted areas. Some cautious estimates put the total annual cost (combined expenses and losses) of health damage caused by air pollution at about three times the money spent on keeping the air clean. Due to the damaging effects of air pollutants, the incidence of chronic and acute diseases of the upper and lower respiratory tracts is rising. In towns and villages with polluted air, chronic bronchitis hits adults three times as often as it does those living in areas of lower levels of polluted air. In the 7-17 age group, the number of cases is gradually rising. There are twice as many asthma cases in Budapest today than there were ten years ago. Many school-children in Budapest suffer from anemia and bone development problems. Tumours kill with increasing frequency. The losses arising from air pollution, coupled with health damage, exceed 15bn forint at the most modest estimate.

Not only people suffer environmental damage. Owing to the faulty water conservancy of the 19th century, whose effects are still being felt, natural forests, reeds, bogs, moorlands and meadows of different types are shrinking in size. Natural plant communities are endangered. A growing number of plant and animal species are facing extinction. Hungary's flora and fauna has so far lost 40 plant and 53 animal species, and a further 1,130 species (making up 2.5 per cent of the total) are endangered. Swamps and bog meadows are in extreme danger.

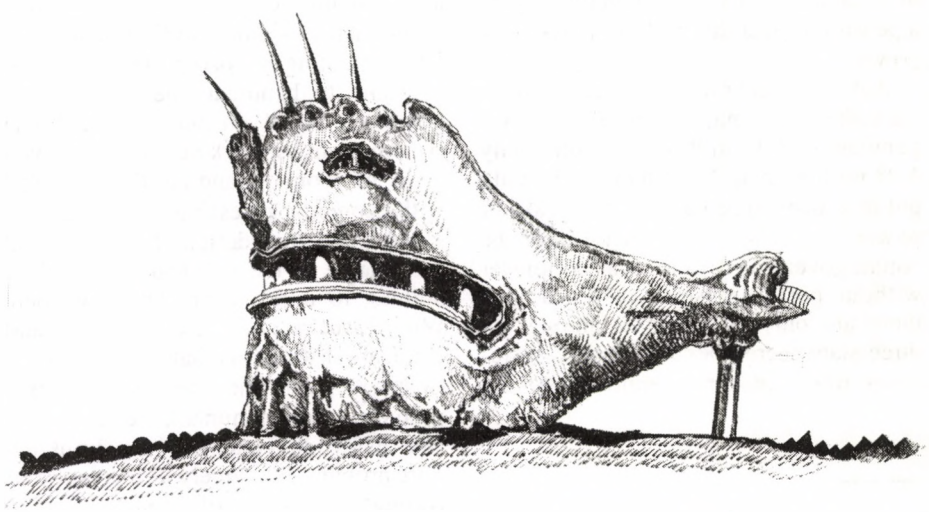
Forests cover 18 per cent (1.7m hectares) of Hungary's territory. Shooting, the much-criticized and mocked passion of the communist bosses, still exploits these forests, yet legislation fails to provide funds for game management. The ruthless exploitation mentioned above in connection with Lake Balaton does not spare forests either. In the rush to make a fast profit, logging and shooting is exhausting forests, whose maintenance is grossly neglected, with almost none of the income being ploughed back. Fortunately, the state of Hungarian forests is still better than the European average. Considerable damage is visible only in 10-12 per cent of forests, although there is a rising trend. Acid rain has been complemented by more than a decade of drought and the fall in the water table.

6 per cent of Hungary's territory is under environmental protection, extended to 415 species of plants, 619 species of animals and 2,500 caves. The most recent of the country's five national parks which stretches across into Austria and Slovakia, surrounds Lake Fertő. Even environmental protection measures often fail to fully protect the land from barbarous pollution. Unscrupulous operators, burying barrels of toxic waste without a licence at the Kiskunsági National Park, dodged the law by simply pulling up the boundary stakes of the Kiskunsági National Park and replacing them some yards further back.

In the economic development of the former socialist countries, a key role is allotted to privatization. This, however, gives rise to a number of problems concerning environmental protection. It is becoming clear how badly an easy to implement Environmental Protection Act is needed. Owing to the legal uncertainty concerning existing pollution, investors cannot know exactly what they may be buying. Since the law fails to stipulate environmental impact surveys, there is no guarantee that the new installations will correspond to environmental interests in the long run. That is the danger Hungary faces in the case of the Budapest World Fair '96. The Environmental Protection

Act of 1976 in force today is good only in that it recognized the political significance of the issue. An Environmental Bill of an actively responsible society based on a market economy is being drafted and, understandably, has triggered as much appreciation by foreign experts as scorn by their Hungarian counterparts. In the course of the discussion in and out of parliament, it always turns out that a market economy and an active society are still a long way from Hungarian thinking. Certainly most citizens find it a burden to cope with the current reforms, a fact unlikely to encourage environmental consciousness, itself hardly popular. This is why considerable responsibility must be shouldered by the educational system which, aside from postgraduate studies, took no account of environmental education and training earlier. The lion's share in creating consciousness was taken by Hungarian scientists, who showed an awareness of the problem at the same time it was being internationally recognized. Environmental sciences were the main subject of the May 1991 Assembly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Due to the inherent schizophrenia of the socialist economy, in which the state as an authority was supposed to restrict and punish polluting state-owned firms, the regulations on toxic wastes as well as water and air pollution, could not work efficiently. Even now, the chief fiscal resources for environmental protection are fines collected from polluting firms. Currently a system of methods more appropriate to a market economy seems to be in the pipeline. In the first positive development, an act on the first "environmental product fee" was passed by Parliament in March 1992. From now on, 0.5 forints of the price of a litre of petrol will go to the Environmental Fund. Other environmental product fees are bound to follow suit, included in the prices of tyres, dry batteries, detergents, and packaging. An environment-friendly element has appeared in the tax system as well: the tax based on the weight of vehicles is halved for cars equipped with catalyzers. And, although not to such an extent, customs regulations also favour the importers of such cars.



Klára Makara

A Woman's Place

Every Hungarian identity card carries a personal identity number of the bearer quite distinct from the card number. A male identity number begins with the digit 1, a female with the digit 2. The symbolism was not lost on many. As elsewhere, women are disadvantaged in many ways, earning smaller incomes, doing more than their fair share of the housework, and they are largely confined to walk-on roles in politics. But there is one consolation: female life expectancy at birth exceeds that of males by a large margin. Hungarian men may expect to live 65.4 years, women 73.8, more than 8 years longer. The advantage is not unambiguous, since it is not youth but old age that is prolonged. In their old age, Hungarian women are widowed and, should they retire at the legal age of 55, they have 19 years more of getting by on a pension of fast diminishing purchasing power.

Anyway, thanks to our longer life-span, we make up the majority of the country's population: 5.39 million as against only 4.98 million men. Nevertheless, we only put in a token appearance at the peaks of power: the only woman member of the Antall government so for was a minister without portfolio, since resigned, and there are only two women among the three state secretaries and deputy secretaries (the ministers' deputies). At the moment, 6.7 per cent of members of Parliament are women, 5 per cent of top executives of major firms, 14 per cent of banking executives and 7 per cent of university rectors, 17 per cent of town and village mayors are women, albeit most of them heading small villages, as only 3 per cent of towns have women as mayors.

All that is more or less in keeping with the thinking of both sexes and with majority expectations. A poll shows that 47 per cent, almost half the country's population, agrees that "national issues are up to men." Only a third of the polled sample categorically disagreed. It would be foolish to demand more political rights for women who do not want them.

Hungary's constitution and legislation have, of course, long included guarantees on equal rights for women. Yet the cultural and economic conditions, the lifestyle and tradition, the "Mum-is-washing-up-while-Dad-is-reading-the-paper" idyll, will long continue to handicap the assertion of genuinely equal chances in the home (where the housework ratio is 3:1) as well as in the economy and politics. Coupled with economic recession and the efforts to cut the budget deficit, democracy and the change in the political system does nothing to improve the lot of women. With insufficient social benefits and childcare institutions that do not manage to survive, with the laws of the market becoming more dominant, the chances of "the disfavoured majority" are shrinking. This problem is scarcely at the centre of Hungary's public life today. Forced backstage by many genuinely more urgent issues and some declared to be such, the

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position women occupy is not of outstanding interest in Hungary right now.

There is one exception, however. Political parties and part of the media are considering the possibility of limiting or even banning abortion. After an approach by the Right to Life lobby, the Constitutional Court decided that legislation and not a mere administrative decree by a minister should regulate abortion. No such bill has been presented to Parliament yet; substantial changes, however, may well limit the freedom of choice of women. It should be noted that sexual knowledge and understanding of contraception are at a low standard in Hungary. For these and other reasons, the number of abortions, at 90,000 annually as against 122,000 live births, is high indeed.

69.4 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 54 are employed (55 years is the age of retirement for women). Employment means an 8 hour a day job; no more than 3.2 per cent of female employees have part-time jobs, although experience elsewhere in Europe and a survey of demand in Hungary confirm that this would better suit women's double interests in a family and a career. Including even mothers of children under 3 years of age on childcare leave, we find that 79 per cent of the appropriate female age group are working. Another source puts their ratio even higher, at 84.5 per cent. In essence, statistics indicate that the economic activity of women, including those on temporary childcare leave, is only a few tenths of one percentage point behind that of men. In theory, fathers might also take childcare leave—yet a Hungarian willing to be a house-husband is a rare bird indeed.

Such a reluctance on the part of men has financial reasons as well. The loss in income is generally smaller if it is the wife rather than the husband who is in receipt of a childcare allowance (which is 75 per cent of wages). Women earn on average 70 per cent of men's incomes: compared to men in the same fields, white collar workers earn 55 per cent and manual workers 67 per cent. That gap grows with age. This is partly caused by the public image of men as—contrary to the facts—the main supporters of their families. I heard an "enlightened" boss at a magazine say that a certain young man should be better paid than a female colleague of the same age and whose qualifications were at least as high, for "he supports a family, after all."

Nevertheless, the more important reasons why women are paid less are objective, reasons such as lower qualifications and career gaps due to childbearing. As regards qualifications, I do not mean that women are less well educated than men. It is true, a slightly higher proportion of boys complete both primary and tertiary education, but more girls complete secondary school. What counts on the labour market, however, is not educational standards but occupational skills, and far more boys than girls attend vocational training schools, and many more men than women attend vocational evening training additional to daytime employment. In the mid-1980s 43 per cent of women had qualified as skilled workers as against 70 per cent of men.

Only 39 per cent of all the registered unemployed are women at present. That lower figure may be explained by the fact that the crisis industries, where large numbers were layed off: metallurgy, mining, engineering, characteristically employ men. In the most backward regions (in Eastern Hungary), those hardest hit by unemployment, the situation has been made worse by men commuting to urban jobs, while their wives stay at home to raise children and cultivate the garden. If their sources of income dry up, these women are also likely to appear on the labour market. Their chances are bad, though: unemployment is expected to hit a number of trades that have become almost exclusively female and are conse-

quently poorly paid (in the textile industry, health and education). Even now 51 per cent of unemployed school-leavers are girls, in some regions 67-68 per cent. The poor chances of young mothers on the labour market are further diminished by recent legislation, making employers rather than social insurance responsible for the first ten days of sick leave. That applies to parents caring for their sick children as well.

Hungarian women go to work just like men, yet their jobs are of a lower status, and they are worse paid. At home they do three to four times as much work and rest that much less than members of the stronger sex. In Hungary home appliances and processed food are available at a level that would be considered basic in the West; housework is far more burdensome and there is, of course, the work related to the kitchen garden and the animals, which in the countryside are a woman's responsibility. The service sector has not yet adapted to working women's time schedules or, where the market has compelled it to do so, it is too expensive for most women. Non-profit nursery schools, that used to be financed mostly by employer or council subsidies, are closing down. In day care centres 124 children compete for every 100 places, and the costs of providing for them are climbing. All those burdens fall even more heavily on the shoulders of single parents. The combined annual number of divorces and deaths of husbands exceeds that of weddings. The divorce rate is among the top three in the world: 8 out of 100 women over 15 are divorcees. Divorce courts usually grant the mothers the custody of their children.

There is no institute, department or even consultancy group in the Hungarian government to deal with the situation of women, despite the fact that in 1982 Hungary joined a UN convention which prescribes that. Where organizations are concerned, women's groups exist only in embryo now that the previous regime's organization is dead. The embryonic group which is least small, with 700 individual members, and over 40 local or occupational memberships, is the Association of Hungarian Women that rose, in the summer of 1989, from the ashes of the former Women's Council. Trade unions, a few political parties, churches and the "green" movement also maintain women's groups. There is also a "Feminist Network" of 50 to 60 female intellectuals, founded a year and a half ago. I recently heard of a new 150 strong grouping calling themselves leftists. Of course, because of the functions and services they offer, such organizations usually involve more people than their actual number of members. An example here is the Association of Hungarian Women, which runs a family and mental health counselling office.

The previous regime's "official" women's movement used to be consulted on all the draft bills concerning families and women. Every essential decision, however, was taken at the one and only Party's headquarters. Now that those days are gone, women's groups are forced to fight for information on issues vital for women, including drafts of legislation. The new organizations will have to learn lobbying techniques. But then, women are supposed to have centuries of experience in controlling things from the back seat.

Sándor Maller

A True Central European

On the 400th anniversary of the birth of Jan Amos Comenius

The influence of Comenius was felt long after his death. Like every great man, he anticipated a great many and left other men far behind. He belonged to other ages, not just his own, and every age judged him differently. Soon after his death he was forgotten, and is better known and more highly thought of in our time then he was in the 19th century. Much more is now known about his life, thanks to the finding of his correspondence and recent research.

After his death, his textbooks were used but not much attention was paid to his novel educational methods. *Orbis pictus*, his first illustrated textbook, produced in Sárospatak in NE Hungary, was much read by Leibniz, Herder and Goethe. Herder, in 1795, recognised him as an innovator in education. After 1870, a good deal of research was done on him in England and France, but chiefly in Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, America, and Italy. A Comenius Society was founded in Berlin in 1892, and his works were published in Czech in eight volumes they were translated into many languages, including Hungarian (repeatedly). More has been published on him than anyone except a scholar could keep track of.

In Moravia, his native land, he has been part of the living tradition from the start. He is spoken of as if he were still alive. He was not an easy man to get on with. He did outstandingly well in his studies, and returned home as an angry young man from the German and Dutch universities he had attended. He showed considerable impatience with his elders, frequently clashed with colleagues, and many of his disciples turned against him in his old age. As so often happens, his educational principles met with little response in his own family. His son would not accept fatherly advice. Nor was Comenius an easy man to talk to. Descartes, remembering their four hour long disputation in Leyden, felt that their points of view differed more when it was all over than at the start.

To the end of his long life he was fond of recalling his Moravian homeland and its wines. His father had owned a vineyard. His stay in Sárospatak (1650-1654) reminded him of home: hills and woods, vineyards, a river much like the familiar Olsava. A part of his ample Sárospatak emoluments was paid in fine Tokay wines.

For some years now his compatriots have celebrated Teacher's Day on his birthday, March 28th, and the Federal Government of Czecho-Slovakia has declared 1992 Education Year. For some time now they have looked on Comenius as not merely the Teacher of the Nation

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but chiefly as a great patriot, often quoting one of his favourite sayings: "I believe that the time will come when my country will itself look after its own business." The world remembers him principally as one who proclaimed the role of education as a social force, with a crucial role in the progress of human nature. For some time world organizations have looked on him as a pioneer in international intellectual cooperation, as one who looks to that cooperation as a factor making for, and preserving, peace. It is only natural, therefore, that UNESCO should call attention to the 400th anniversary of his birth.

He was first known by the name of his native village Nivnice, and his native country, Moravia. His father's family were the Szeges, a name known for centuries in the medieval marches of Hungary, chiefly in the riparian villages of the Olsava, such as Uhersky-Brod Uhersky-Ostroh and Uhersky-Hradiste (Uhersky=Hungarian). His father, Martin Szeges, took the name Komnansy from the village of Komna, Jan Amos altered that to Komensky, which he later Latinized as Comenius, though he remained a loyal Moravian to his death. Half a year before he died, however, in a dedication, perhaps for the first time, he signed with the original name of his family. Jan Amos Ko, he started, then clearly crossing out Ko, he changed it to Szeges.

A statue was erected on the 300th anniversary of his birth in the courtyard of the Nivnice flour mill, his father and grandfather both having been millers, and village headmen. Since 1947 a memorial tablet graces what is presumed to be the house where he was born, and the statue was transferred to its present location in 1956. Other statues were erected in Komna in 1950, and in Uhersky-Brod in 1956. The latter, life-size in a gown, in the square in front of the Comenius Museum, is perhaps the most successful. There are also statues at Szakolca, near what used to be the Hungarian frontier, and at Sárospatak, where a street as well as a Teachers' College bear his name—the latter has been, since 1986, the seat of the Hungarian Comenius Society. There are two memorial tablets in Sárospatak, one in the street named after him, the other in the main entrance of the Calvinist College. Various national medallions, as well as the statues and portraits of the time, show him as an old man. It was only his foreward looking ideas, timely today and in the future, that have preserved his youthfulness.

He was barely twenty when he wrote his first book, afterwards came a long series of volumes and studies to mark the course of his life. His first book outlined an ideal—perhaps utopian—school where all the disciplines would be taught, organically linked, and on firm foundations. He called it *Schola pansophica*, and it can truly be described as the practical theology of one of the best-read men of his time, one who always thought of himself as a theologian.

The school and science of Comenius belong to everybody. "Not only to an elite, not only to the children of the rich and powerful, but to every boy and girl, be they noble or not, from a city, town, or village, or a lonely homestead." Comenius was the most democratic educator of his age.

He put his faith in an education that renewed the life of man. There could be no constraint in his school, it had to be an isle of joy and happiness, where the discipline of interest would replace that of the rod.

His educational system has lost none of its modernity. Stressing the importance of pre-school education before the age of six was a novelty. Six years of primary school, desirable in every parish, in which teaching in the native language formed the backbone, were based on that. The next level was the six year urban Latin school, accessible to everybody but

chiefly to those who were interested and had the necessary ability. Six university years followed after a serious examination, this was to be completed, particularly in the case of the truly gifted, by the Grand Tour. The university was also the home of research, the "school of light", where humanity cooperating in science, embraced each other above the frontiers of countries. All this implied education and self-improvement for life. "Teaching everything to everybody" was utopian, and a dangerous heresy in Comenius' time but, "let us lead man, as much as we can, into freedom, liberating him from every dogma, denomination and tie", was already the voice of the Enlightenment.

Comenius stressed both the native and foreign languages as a means and not an end, to "allow neighbours to communicate". Latin complemented the native language in making possible familiarity with the arts and sciences. Later he also considered creating a universal artificial language.

He was at his most progressive in his methodological principles. Everything for everybody, but in step with inner development, only moving forward when the pupil's mind was ready. Teaching had to be simple, demonstrating everything, and applying it to life, explaining everything in the native language as well. Every class had to have its own room, with a well-trained and paid teacher. Good cheap textbooks and books had to be available to teachers and pupils. Books were "the honing stones of talent: if a nation is well supplied with books, it will shine."

Through his writings and his far-flung correspondence his educational plans became widely known and made Comenius welcome in many countries after he was exiled from Moravia. He had to flee during the Thirty Years' War, along with the Moravian Brethren, whose bishop he was.

His first stop, which turned into a permanent base, was Leszno, in Poland. England followed (1641-1642), but the

G. Glouer: Johan Amos Comenius

Irish Rebellion and the dispute between King and Parliament made the situation uncertain. His many friends included Samuel Hartlib, John Dury, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the mathematician, and John Milton. Comenius' correspondence with Milton has survived.

Faced with a choice between Richelieu's France and Oxenstierna's Sweden, he chose the latter (1642-1648). Queen Christina used his *Janua,* and he conversed with her in Latin. But the Swedes expected him to write textbooks and not to urge educational reform. In addition, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) meant that his exile, and that of the Moravian Brethren, had now become irrevocable.

Comenius moved to Sárospatak in May 1650, on the invitation of Zsuzsanna Lorántffy (1600-1660), the widow of George I Rákóczi (1593-1648), Prince of Transylvania. He expected political help

from the Rákóczis, both for himself and his fellow exiles. Many of the Brethren had settled in Miskolc, Tiszakeszi, Hernádlak, and Megyaszó in NE Hungary. In return he promised to reform the school at Sárospatak, making it an example to be followed by others in Hungary, "filled with an inner light and radiating that light far and wide." Details were discussed in Tokaj. In addition to the principles already discussed, Comenius stipulated the following: an ample school building with seven classes, dormitories for as many pupils as possible, a refectory where poor pupils would be fed free of charge or for a small payment, "thus permitting dormant talents to be awakened," well-paid teachers, a printing office amply supplied with type and skilled labour, a common table for the children of the Moravian Brethren, as a free gift. Agreement was reached, and Comenius moved to Sárospatak in late autumn.

The Transylvania and Sárospatak of the Rákóczis provided the right atmosphere for Comenius. His theology came to include not only religious tolerance but solidarity and understanding between denominations and nations. This became one of the pillars shoring up his educational practice. It was a synthesis of the Reformation, of Humanism, and of Natural Philosophy. The proclaimed aim was to educate every man to be free, and that was in harmony with the ideas of the Sárospatak humanists. Had it not been so, they would not have been able to put up with them, and vice versa. Zsuzsanna Lorántffy kept her promise and, from 1650 on, provided free board and, lodging and education for twelve children of the Moravian Brethren.

A start was made on the reorganization of the school but progress was slow. There was trouble with the pupils, whose attitude to their studies was superficial. "You must summon all your strength to conquer laziness... seize every opportunity"- Comenius encouraged them. Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties, much worked out well, and the four years proved the most fruitful of his life as regards eductional practise. His *Schola ludus* written in Sárospatak, popularized school dramatic societies, his *Orbis pictus* later became the best known textbook anywhere. At his suggestion, lay curators counterbalanced clerical influence and raised the respect in which the Calvinist College was held.

Suddenly everything changed. The wife (a niece of Charles I. of England's queen) of young Sigismund Rákóczi, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy's son, died in 1651, and her husband followed her in 1652. Comenius had officiated at their marriage, now he wrote an elegy on their death. Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, mourning her son, in ill-health herself, could not replace him. Comenius resigned and left Sárospatak in 1654.

He thought highly of the Hungarians as a nation. "My dear Hungarians, my hope [...] Plough a new furrow for yourselves. [...] If you can make use of your talents, you will not be second in wisdom to any nation in Europe, since neither nature, nor the heavens, nor the soil is inimical to you."

He went straight back to Leszno from Sárospatak, but Catholic Polish troops had set fire to the town. All of Comenius' worldly goods perished. What was worse, so had his manuscripts, including the thesaurus of the Czech language he had spent decades compiling. He had to be on the move again, embarking on what proved to be his last journey. He died in Amsterdam, on the 15th of November 1670, aged 78. Words from his *Didactica magna* could be taken as his epigraph:

"We are free to aim high: we always were, and always will be."

András Gergely

Dreaming and Achieving

Széchenyi as Reformer

Time and again Hungary has been in need of reformers. Elsewhere things have rolled on in a constant struggle between those wishing for something new and those who insisted on the old. In Hungary generations passed without anyone desiring change. The trumpets had to be sounded again in every age. Awakeners were born, a new generation to raise the alarm and cry havoc. The sleeping nation then awoke, started to get things done, only to sink into stupor again after being clubbed down, or merely tiring.

Torpor was certainly not characteristic of Hungary in the first quarter of the 19th century. Napoleon's artillery thundered, the Emperor of France even invaded Hungary, hundreds of thousands of soldiers marched over and through the country.

The economy and social life revived.

After 1815, however, the order was silence. The armies were disbanded, and the boom came to an end. The Estates were not convened. Censorship crippled the communication of ideas.

Those who had lived through the war, rejoiced at peace and reckoned that the prescribed silence, quiet and economic depression would come to an end some time. Patience was the order of the day.

By the end of the 1820s, the young had enough of this prescribed peace. Aristocrats, who could not find their place at home, went abroad: they travelled, felt Byronic, and criticized the way things were.

Count István Széchenyi, the scion of a wealthy landowning family and a soldier of the Habsburg Emperor, home from his Grand Tour, started on a gigantic and romantic enterprise. What he had in mind was to change the dull and backward country in which he had been born, to his own liking and in accordance with his own ideas.

For some time he gathered information, read and made his plans. Around 1830, he decided to become a public figure as a politician of liberal reform. He addressed the Diet, published books, organized, and took the initiative. He set to work not on the basis of fantasies but using England as a model. His contemporaries called him an anglomane, claiming that he even liked the fog if

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that could be shown to be English. His conservative contemporaries thought he had his head in the clouds, but posterity was more likely to praise his sense for reality and his heroic nature.

Count István Széchenyi, who was born 200 years ago, is called "the greatest of the Magyars" in his homeland. This may be difficult to prove to non-Hungarians, the comparison being with his Hungarian contemporaries—many of whom are unknown outside the country.

Another comparison might be with other *Vormärz* (the decades preceding 1848) reformers. Széchenyi was a reformer, one of the prominent politicians and thinkers paving the way for a transition from feudalism to a bourgeois world, from the estates of the realm to parliamentary democracy.

Several types of reformers can be distinguished.

The first type includes those who were involved in "conspiracies", who—inspired not least by the French Revolution, which they mistakenly looked on as the fruit of conscious planning by a few individuals—formed secret societies with the aim of seizing power. Such movements, marked occasionally by an inclination towards violence, included the Hungarian Jacobins as early as 1794, the Decembrists in Russia in 1825, and the Polish rebels of 1830. All the Italian Carbonari, including Mazzini, can also be included.

The second type, which may be said to be the opposite of the former, is made up of the epigones of the Enlightenment, who sought to modernize society through a political process. By this they meant infiltrating, rather than seizing, or overthrowing, power. Since they were high-ranking officials, historians term them a kind of "bureaucratic liberal" who sought to introduce reforms through the occupation of key posts in the echelons of government. They did indeed leave their mark on the early 19th century in Europe. The best known include Prussian reformers such as Generals Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, or Freiherr von Stein, who introduced bourgeois reforms, but Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a minister in the small Grand Duchy of Sachsen-Weimar, may likewise be classed among them.

After 1815, those who hoped to achieve reform through the state machinery, lost ground; the era of Metternich was unpropitious for such aspirations. Nevertheless, such notables as Baron Strossmayer, the bishop of Diakovar in Croatia, or Prince Cuza of the Danubian Principalities, were active in more underdeveloped regions even after 1848.

The third type, undoubtedly the most significant of the pre-1848 years, is that of liberal reformers of the opposition. As against the other two types, they wanted to achieve power by legal means. They refused to accept the old state machinery, deemed it unreformable, and sought to reconstruct it completely, but by legal rather than by secret or conspiratorial means. That was liberalism. Not unexpectedly, the most prominent amongst them had studied law and had started their careers as lawyers. The legal profession enabled them to acquire adequate knowledge of constitutional law, and their work brought them into contact with the real forces of society. As practising politicians, they were

pragmatic rather than doctrinaire. They were active mainly in areas which allowed them legal scope for furthering their aspirations. They were most active in Hungary's Reform Era; here the feudal Diet was regularly convened from 1825, with some scope for liberal reform policies to gather momentum. Kossuth, Deák and Eötvös, all prominent reform politicians, had all entered the legal profession and had started their political lives in the feudal Diet. The liberal opposition in the South German diets (*Landtage*) of Baden, Württemberg or little Hessen-Darmstadt, should also be mentioned. The most noted figure of the South-German liberal opposition was Heinrich von Gagern, the president of the German national assembly in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt am Main in 1848. (The Russian *zemstvo* liberalism of the 1860s could also be said to be a late version of this type.) The liberal reformers of the opposition also boasted theoreticians, mainly in regions where they had no opportunity to express their views in parliament or in a free press. The liberal opposition's version of a long march towards the capture and transformation of power was embodied in voluminous scholarly compendia published in Germany; thus the famous *Staatslexikon,* edited by Rotteck and Welcker in the 1830s, the works of Professor Gervinus, and the theoretical writings of Bluntschli in Switzerland.

The fourth type of pre-1848 reformers is that of romantic and heroic individuals. They did not seek to transform society as a whole all on their own but, on the contrary, were able to identify themselves almost entirely with the fate of a nation, not always their own. Friedrich von Schiller should be mentioned, who anticipated, as it were, a German nation, when it was still a collection of principalities, or Lord Byron, who identified himself with the Greek struggle for freedom, or Pushkin, who was alive to the desire of the Caucasian peoples for freedom, or Heine, who spent a large part of his life in France, or Petőfi of Hungary, who dreamt of worldwide freedom, and a large number of Poles, perhaps with Mickiewicz at their head, who linked the cause of national freedom with universal freedom for Europe. These men, mainly writers and poets, formulated theories of modernization that were culture-based. Trail-blazers, like Garibaldi of Italy, who tried to reform society by action, belong to this type. Others, like Proudhon of France or Táncsics of Hungary, tried to achieve their aim by envisioning, and eventually striving to realize a completely new, imagined society. One should also include here the Utopians, whom one could call negativists, though this may sound strange. They tried to reach a Utopian goal by a total negation of what was in existence.

Lastly, this typology includes the pragmatist reformers, the technocratic "positivists." Those who wanted to gain their ends chiefly by practical action. They sought to change society by small and slow steps, building railways and factories. Yet they were not simply acting as entrepreneurs, but in the awareness and knowledge of the fact that by so doing they were reforming society. That is to say that they looked on their technical constructions and practical work as "acts of reform", carried out in an effort to attain conceptual goals. This type includes numerous engineers and entrepreneurs, many enthusiastic advocates of the industrial revolution, such as the German Friedrich von List, whose

economic theories and practical deeds promoted that process, or Justus Liebig, a pioneer in agriculture, and a whole range of other agricultural reformers in Central and Eastern Europe; Camphausen, a manufacturer in the Rhineland, many entrepreneurs in pre-1848 Bohemia, or, and this example may surprise some, Archduke Johann, of the House of Habsburg, who made great efforts in furtherance of pragmatic reform projects.

Undoubtedly several of these transitions overlap, and perhaps one could distinguish additional types, but I feel that it was in a single case that an intermingling of types produced a new quality, namely in the activities of Marx and Engels, who employed conspirational methods—the Communist League was after all an illegal enterprise of conspirators—and concurrently cherished romantic and heroic aspirations, with the individual in focus, and with personal performance seen as a decisive factor in the transformation of society. They also displayed aspects of negativism and Utopianism, as they devised a new theory of a future society by a total negation of the present. Nevertheless, one cannot fail to recognize the positivist aspect of their activities, as they were keen exponents of the industrial revolution, and recognized and advocated the development of a technical civilization, which they did not criticize. They tried, with their scholarly works, to lay the foundations of a new society. This latter aspiration is typically positivist. The result of this peculiar admixture is a new kind of quality, which was unique in the pre-1848 years.

Where then should one place Count István Széchenyi, in terms of these five types? We may exclude him from one of these entirely: Széchenyi was never a conspirator; he would not work to achieve his goals by illegal means. However, there are good reasons for classifying him with any of the remaining types. He advocated the implementation of reforms by the State, since he himself held government office. At the beginning of his career, and virtually throughout his life, he was a politician of the opposition; his entire philosophy was typically liberal, he was a supporter of constitutionality, but at the same time, he was engaged in a romantic-heroic enterprise, assigning exceptional importance to his own role and, accordingly, he acted with an exceptional sense of responsibility.

He looked on his own efforts as those of someone moulding a nation, regenerating a whole nation and, in that romantic-heroic enterprise he reserved a prominent place for culture. As he put it in a well-known dictum, the real wealth of a nation rests on a multitude of educated people. Yet it is neither exaggeration nor one-sided to regard him as a technocrat as well, for much innovation, particularly in the development of the infrastructure, was due to his initiative. It was he who set in motion the building of steamboats and the first permanent bridge over the Danube in Hungary, launched projects for railway construction, regulated rivers, and so on and on. Of course, all this was intended to transform society as a whole. Thus his lifework shows typical traits of a technocratic reformer as well. Széchenyi therefore stands for a mixed type of reformer.

One may ask whether this typology is correct if Széchenyi does not fit neatly into any of the categories. Many of the names listed are those of aristocrats. Indeed, the given typology may be transcended by distinguishing another type, that of aristocratic reformers. There is Freiherr von Stein, who introduced reforms in Prussia, albeit he himself was not of Prussian origin, but was proud of the fact that his family was *Reichsunmittelbar*, that his liege lord was no mere Prince but the Holy Roman Emperor himself. There is Lord Byron, who made common cause with the Greek people in their struggle for freedom. There we have Lafayette, a French marquis who took part in the American War of Independence. There is Count Confalioneri, who was relatively late in realizing that he was Italian, a member of the Italian nation. Noticeably, it was only later that some of these individuals chose, and consciously so, a nation, as if for themselves, a nation whose fate they shared. This is a distinctive feature for these aristocrats.

Széchenyi, too, was late in breaking away from his pre-national aristocratic environment, consciously making common cause with a nation. Széchenyi was a Magyar. He himself was certainly of Hungarian origin, but it was not until he had grown to maturity that he grew aware of being a Hungarian and accepted that condition. One could say that he renewed his Hungarianness. The individuals named, Széchenyi included, associated their activities with their high social standing, and wished to avoid the dilemma of Court versus opposition. Three Habsburgs can be added to this type. Archduke Johann was considered a rebel by many at Court, although he attempted practical reforms that were by no means bold in a political sense. Then there was Archduke Joseph, Palatine of Hungary for fifty years, who was known at Court as "Rákóczi", that is a "Kuruc", a rebel, for his attempts to carry out some rather modest reforms in urban and infrastructural development and in the pattern of land tenure. Finally, Joseph's son, Archduke Stephan, the last Palatine of Hungary in 1848, who had come to accept even political reforms, since he remained in office down to September 1848, resigning only at the demand of the Court in Vienna.

A feature common to aristocratic reformers lies in their seeking a new legitimacy, in the effort to have their high social standing legitimized by assuming new roles, neither oppositionary nor hierarchical. Though Byron or Széchenyi were in opposition, and Stein stood close to the state machinery, they tried to assume an intermediate role, to engage in activities whereby, rather than pursuing political goals, they could contribute towards the betterment of their respective nations, whether original or chosen, thus providing for a new legitimation of their own persons and families. There was good reason why the English aristocracy stood as the ideal of each. In that period the English aristocracy could claim many accomplishments, as archeologists, travellers and civil servants, or as writers and politicians, thereby winning acceptance of their social standing. Acute social conflicts were underway and a working-class movement was gathering strength, but, strangely enough, no social group of importance questioned the privileges, though diminishing, of the aristocracy.

This is how the characteristics of Széchenyi can also be defined. He did not fit into any one of the said types and roles. He tried them all, as he was a liberal of the opposition, and remained one all his life, though he drew nearer to the court party and held government office. He formed a romantic image of the future, in which he assigned a special role to education. He was guided by a romantic compulsion to act. He proved to be a calculating man who espoused the doctrine of utility in any enterprise. It is characteristic that he relied on utilitarianism even to back the introduction of Hungarian as the official language to replace Latin, whereas in politics he strove for progress as an exponent of constitutionality, not only through constitutional reform, but also through practical projects.

Clearly, Széchenyi's life was marked by shifts of emphasis. At the start of his career, which coincided with the initial phase of the Reform Era in Hungary, from around 1830 to 1840, his traits were more those of a liberal politician of the opposition; in his practical activities, including the regulation of the Danube, a project for which he held the post of Royal Commissioner, and the construction of the Chain Bridge, spanning Pest and Buda, he acted on his own, embarking on an individual course of action.

In the 1840s, Széchenyi was drawing closer to the chancery, until, as noted, he eventually held government office, trying to implement transport development and river control projects within an institutional framework, by organizing various societies. At that time he laid great emphasis on the formation of such civil organizations. He tended to stay clear of politics, even turning against the liberal opposition for a while, yet this did not prevent him—after the constitutional change in 1848, or the "lawful revolution", as István Deák aptly termed it—from joining its responsible government, that of Count Lajos Batthyány, in which he served as a minister alongside Lajos Kossuth, his former antagonist.

In the autumn of 1848, Széchenyi suffered a nervous breakdown and afterwards lived in seclusion. His recovery took many long years. He was never to leave the asylum where his physicians had taken him. In his last years he wrote copiously, his scathing criticism being reminiscent of Swift as much as of the political pamphlets of Marx in exile.

Széchenyi tried almost all the possible roles of a reformer (except for the conspiratorial type, it must be stressed once again). The sheer diversity of these roles, and his amazing performance in all of them, rightly earned him the epithet "the greatest of the Magyars", bestowed upon him by his nation, by Lajos Kossuth himself, his greatest political antagonist.

András Gerő

March 15th: The Fortunes of a National Day

On March 15th, 1848 a bloodless revolution took place in Pest under the leadership of young radicals, clearing the way to the political implementation of the ideas of the Age of Reform and to the growth of a bourgeois society in Hungary. The Age of Reform had begun in the 1830s, when the liberal noble members of the diet presented a legislative programme that aimed to abolish feudal institutions, to establish equality before the law and to achieve a greater measure of independence for Hungary, which at the time was one of the Habsburg dominions. However, these liberals did not have sufficient political weight to realize their programme. The wave of revolutions sweeping across Europe coupled with the events in Pest on March 15th were needed to ensure that on April 11th, 1848 the necessary bills were passed. The Habsburg court, which initially accepted the revolutionary developments, tried to reverse them by employing military resources of their own, and when all else failed, called in the greatest military power of contemporary Europe, the pillar on which European conservatism rested—the Russian army. The outcome was inevitable: the Hungarian army surrendered in August 1849, and the Hungarian revolution had come to an end.

Thus, March 15th, 1848 came to symbolize two different, although closely connected, episodes in Hungarian history. It stood for reform completed by a revolution. It also stood for a heroic struggle to achieve constitutional development, social emancipation and political liberation, which culminated in the country's declaration of independence.

The significance of 1848-49 was fully understood by contemporaries. The canonization of both events and some of the actors promptly got under way. In Hungary, the revolution coincided with the time when national identity, in the modern sense of the term, took shape: 1848-49 became part of the national myth. Lajos Kossuth, who was minister of finance in 1848 and Regent of Hungary in 1849, was simply referred to as "our father Kossuth". When registering his passage through the town gate, the Debrecen gatekeeper entered

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as Kossuth's occupation "the Moses of the Hungarians". The events of 1848-1849 and the symbols of the March 15th revolution had a similar fate: these, too, soon became canonized. The young radicals looked to the French Revolution as an example and a pattern to be copied. Hence, in their quest for a national symbol, they chose a red-white-and-green tricolour, arranged, indeed, as a cockarde. Likewise, members of the National Guard wore a red-white-and-green armband during the 1956 revolution.) Such symbols served to display personal commitment.

But March 15th was not looked on as a festival by contemporaries. Nor could they have done so, they had lived through it, they had made it happen. Recognizing its importance, the young radicals could be solemn and ceremonious when speaking about the day. There was a certain pathos about them when they seized a press from an owner who showed no kind of resistance, to print their Twelve Points and Sándor Petőfi's *Nemzeti dal* (National song). They knew full well that they were attending the birth of a free press in Hungary. Similarly, they created a proper ceremony for the liberation of Mihály Táncsics, one (of two) political prisoners. They knew the issue was not the release of an individual, but making sure nobody could be persecuted for his political views.

A good many of Kossuth's statements showed a similar pathos, and the explanation lies not merely in his rhetorical skills, or in late Romanticism. In July 1848, the Hungarian Parliament, on their feet, granted the requested credits and recruits. Kossuth said in answer that, if the act would be implemented as enthusiastically as it was passed, even the gates of hell could not bring down Hungary. The confusion in the biblical turn of phrase (gates, after all, do not bring down anything) was readily overlooked by the audience, who appreciated the intention of the speaker to present the occasion in a biblical light.

Further examples of the spontaneous solemnity displayed by the participants of the revolution could be listed. The efforts of the liberal opposition during the Age of Reform cleared the way for the radical, and crucial changes of March 15th, 1848. The sequence of events during the 1848-49 Revolution brought into harmony the causes of constitutionalism and national sovereignty—causes people could emotionally identify with. The participants created something whose gravity they were aware of at the time. They gave the nation a day to remember. Later generations had to make up their minds what to do with it: whether to ignore it or celebrate it, and if the latter, celebrate it in what way?

The chosen holiday

Naturally, the eventful days of 1848-49 provided more than one occasion that could be celebrated as anniversaries.

However, of all the candidates, only one date could seriously challenge March 15th. This was April 14th, the day when the Declaration of Independence was passed by the National Assembly. (The Declaration was proclaimed on April 16th, 1849). Had the newly declared Hungarian state managed to

survive, it would have certainly traced its origin to that date, in which case April 14th would have been found worthy of celebration. Those who issued the Declaration—and especially Kossuth—seem to have anticipated such a possibility, if one is to go by the theatricality that surrounded it and the somewhat ornate appearance of the document.

However, this potential rival to March 15th did have a few serious drawbacks. Firstly, since the Declaration was planned by the political leadership, the event lacked that amalgam of spontaneity and history-making which is always captivating. Even more important was that, although the rejoicing members marched cheering from the poorly attended House over to the Debrecen Calvinist Church, there was really no consensus over the issue. Partly because of this lack of consensus did the Declaration fail to mention the future form of the Hungarian government (this was left to Bertalan Szemere who, as prime minister, called the new government republican). The Declaration of Independence thus did not contain a direct message concerning freedom. March 15th, by contrast, conveyed such a message bluntly and forcefully.

Once the Russian armies had abruptly brought to an end the short life of the independent Hungarian state, and the public will as embodied in Parliament could not express what the Hungarian nation wished to celebrate, the choice was left to the future.

After 1849, the absolutist regime put the question into abeyance. A full-scale terror waged by the state eventually gave way to a less severe, though still oppressive, bureaucratic and secret police rule. Open criticism of Habsburg rule was impossible, and protests against an administration bent on smothering national and liberal feelings had to be indirect, being expressed at, for instance, funerals. (The burial of the poet Vörösmarty in 1855 was one such occasion.) In the late 1850s, when absolutism was no longer as firmly in charge across Europe, there were more signs of open defiance. This defiance was manifested in the fashion for wearing Hungarian national dress, a memorial celebration for Ferenc Kazinczy the writer, and a minor demonstration during the performance of Ferenc Erkel's *László Hunyadi*, a romantic historical opera with a Hungarian theme.

Naturally, when an absolutist regime is based on the simultaneous rejection of nationalism and liberalism, and when this rejection is backed by extreme oppression, the public tends to express its own views in a diametrically opposed way.

And here we have arrived at the historical moment when the question of what occasion the nation should celebrate was finally answered. In 1860, after a few occasional protests, the politically conscious section of the Hungarian public felt that the opportunity to express its symbolic will had arrived. On hearing the news that the people of Tuscany and Modena had prevented the return of the Habsburg administration, and that they had united with Piedmont under the leadership of Cavour, the students of Pest decided to celebrate March 15th publicly. The authorities, their confidence shaken, did not have the power to prevent the demonstration, only to break it up. On their way to the cemetery,

the demonstrators were stopped at a road barrier manned by troops who opened fire. One of the people injured was Géza Forinyák, who then died of his wounds. His funeral on April 4th was attended by at least a quarter of the population of Pest-Buda. (The name used of the twin cities before they were united with Óbuda in 1873 to form Budapest.)

On March 15th, 1860 the people made their choice—the question of what to celebrate was answered by their action. The context of absolutism made it clear that the chosen occasion should reflect the full harmony of national and liberal sentiment—as had been the case on March 15th, 1848. It was also clear that the broadest popular consensus was required, since in this given situation the state was hostile—just as it had been on March 15th, 1848. Therefore, the chosen occasion had to have a firm oppositional and anti-establishment character. To my mind, it was the latter consideration which tipped the scale in favour of March 15th, which expressed opposition and popular feeling, instead of April 14th, the date suggested from above and commemorating an originally statist occasion.

Violent coercion directed against a concrete and public commemoration backfired: the prestige of March 15th was further enhanced, its oppositional and popular character was strengthened, and the bonds between national and liberal sentiment grew stronger. These origins gave a distinct character to Liberty Day, a character that the subsequent establishments could never again ignore.

Liberty Day embezzled

Naturally, the people's choice was not accepted by an administration which reverted to the principles of absolutist government. Nor did the situation change significantly after the political "Compromise" of 1867. The Hungarian government within the Austro-Hungarian Empire felt uncomfortable about March 15th, for it was an event it could under no circumstances celebrate officially, for the simple reason that the King/Emperor, Francis Joseph I, would never have allowed it. It followed from the very nature of the "Compromise" that concessions were made by both sides: concessions that determined the nature of constitutionalism, the assertion of Hungary's national interests and, of course, social issues. In other words, everything that March 15th stood for was subject to negotiations. The royal prerogative—now even guaranteed in the constitution—the limitations on Hungary's sovereignty by the acceptance of the joint affairs (defence, finance and foreign policy), and the flourishing of entailed estates were not easily reconciled with the radicalism of 1848, with its demands for the monarch's role to be reduced to a mere formality, for Hungary's sovereignty to be extended, and for introducing compulsory compensation for the abolition of serfdom.

So, despite the fact that it lacked the blessing of the state, March 15th embarked on an independent life after 1867, producing everywhere in the

country the cult of "abiding by 1848". This, of course, was a broadly interpreted oppositional attitude. As things stood, the public—but not the state—was more or less free to celebrate any occasion it wished to. In the period that followed the "Compromise", "abidance by 1848", which actually lost much of its radical character with the passing of time, provided a solid platform for the opposition. They were thus able to keep the national mythology surrounding 1848 alive, including the solemnity of March 15th itself.

The various associations founded by ex-members of Kossuth's army, burgher and working men's clubs, and church schools (especially those of the Protestant churches), and all municipal councils dominated by the Parliamentary opposition, the publishers and the press who found a market in the inexhaustible interest in 1848, all of these were the institutional background for the March 15th celebrations. All over the country, statues of Kossuth were raised, either financed by public donation or by municipal councils. A bronze statue of Sándor Petőfi, by Miklós Izsó and Adolf Huszár, was erected on the Pest bank of the Danube in 1882. Because of its location, this monument was predestined to be the scene of later commemorations.

Hungarians remained loyal to March 15th, the popular choice for Liberty Day, and were even willing to donate money to the cause, as evidenced by a host of related statues and publications.

The government, on the other hand, recognized what was happening but chose not to react.

This peculiar symbiosis lasted until 1897, when Ferenc Kossuth, the son of Lajos Kossuth, who had returned from exile and had become an opposition MP (his father had died in exile in 1894), moved in the House that March 15th be declared a national holiday. His motion was not unconnected with the impending fiftieth anniversary.

Dezső Bánffy, the Prime Minister, was also of the opinion that a date should be designated to mark the events of 1848-49. However, he ignored the popular choice and suggested a date which no one had until then seriously considered. Bánffy proposed April 11th, the day when the 1848 laws were promulgated. (He was probably influenced in his choice by the fact that Francis Joseph, who had not succeeded to the throne at that point, had personally attended the ceremony in Pozsony on April 11th, 1848. At the time of Bánffy's appointment as Prime Minister, Francis Joseph, by then King of Hungary, had urged Bánffy to put an end to the cult of Kossuth.)

The opposition's argument, that the nation had already made its choice was to no avail. Members of the government party who pointed out that April 11th could only be an official celebration, not a popular one, were unable to affect the outcome of the parliamentary vote. The government's voting machine worked and Act V of 1898, declaring April 11th a national holiday was passed.

At the time, members of the government party actually did believe that they had more or less acted as the public expected them to. The nation was given a chance to commemorate 1848 and could do so in a way which did not offend the King.

If you want to celebrate 1848 that badly, then April 11th is as good a day as any was the implicit message. In this way the government party hoped to embezzle March 15th, the nation's choice.

They were, of course, wrong. The result—as could have been expected—was to further enhance the social prestige, the popular and anti-establishment character, the national and liberal values of the officially shunned Liberty Day.

In dualist Hungary, March 15th became an occasion very close to the people's heart. Neither the King nor the government had the power to eradicate its own choice from the nation's memory.

The celebration nationalized

In 1918, after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the victory of the Hungarian democratic revolution, it appeared for a brief moment that the nation's day would at last be given the official recognition it deserved. It was natural for the new republic—ideologically aligned with the forces formerly in opposition—to espouse the cause of March 15th, since it promised a broader franchise, a sovereign state, democracy and social change. It seemed that in the matter of March 15th the people and the democratic state could finally come together—as was in fact demonstrated by March 15, 1919.

This short-lived democratic episode survived only for six more days after the March 15th celebration. The Soviet Republic that replaced it lasted 133 days, too brief a period even to allow the inherent conflict between a regime committed to internationalism and national and liberal sentiment, as represented by March 15th to come to the fore.

How to mark March 15th posed a difficult question for the authorities in the years that Regent Miklós Horthy ruled (1920-1944). The regime, which defined itself as counter-revolutionary, rejected anything that smacked of revolution, especially when it had a bearing on the democratic revolution of 1918 and the communist episode of 1919. It felt considerable hostility both to the revolutionary aspects of March 15th, 1848, and to the democratic republic of 1918, whose leaders had stressed the continuity between 1848 and 1918. Horthy's conservative, right-wing and authoritarian regime rejected the liberal and democratic features of the heritage of 1848. Indeed, it went as far as ascribing the decline of Hungary to an excess of liberty. All this suggested that the date would be neglected. These were however arguments in favour of integrating the heritage and principal symbols of 1848.

Since the Horthy regime worked for a revision of the Treaty of Trianon, it badly needed national ideals to rally popular support. Hence it followed that, even if the ideology associated with 1848 was unacceptable, for tactical reasons it decided to attempt to expropriate the popular esteem 1848 enjoyed.

Hungary had lost the war, but had come out of it as an independent country. In consequence, some of the demands of 1848 were no longer taboo. The country was still a kingdom constitutionally but, for foreign policy reasons, the

Habsburg dynasty had been dethroned. To pretend that March 15th did not exist would have been out of tune with *Realpolitik*. The government knew that, if it failed to exploit the potential inherent in March 15th, the democratic opposition and the left would do so in its stead. The years that had passed since 1860 proved that it was impossible to get rid of March 15th by denying its existence or attempting to substitute another holiday for it.

It took several years for the government to make up its mind. At last an anniversary, this time the eightieth, offered the required occasion without losing face. After years of dragging its feet the dilemma was resolved by Count Kunó Klebelsberg, the Minister for Religion and Education. He decided to "nationalize" aspects of the 1848 ideology that suited the requirements of the regime.

On November 6th 1927, a statue of Lajos Kossuth, by János Horvay was unveiled in front of the Parliament building. The idea of placing a statue of Kossuth there was first mentioned by the Budapest metropolitan council 24 years earlier. Kossuth and his 1848 ministers standing around him displayed sombre countenances. There was a relief on the reverse of the stone wall behind the statue. It showed a man bidding farewell to his wife and child, an enthusiastic young man, a drummer, an old man waving a flag, a man and his son as they set out for battle, and a wounded soldier. The message of the memorial was the militarization of the nation rather than national freedom and independence. It conveyed the idea that the nation was ready to fight against oppression.

That same month the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament enacted Klebelsberg's bill (Law XXXI of 1927) in which March 15th was declared an official national holiday. (The same law annulled Law V of 1898, which declared April 11th a national holiday.) Law XXXII of 1927 spelled out Kossuth's undying virtues.

It had taken seven long years for the ruling elite of the Horthy regime to grapple with the problem called March 15th. At last they opted for nationalization, which in effect meant remoulding it to their own purposes. When selecting locations for commemoration, they often opted—in addition to the obvious choice of the National Museum in Budapest—for places that had little in common with March 15th, but were ideal for driving home the ideas of irredentism and militarism. In subsequent years, March 15th was often observed at irredentist statues and at the National Memorial Stone in Heroes' Square in Budapest. (The inscription there read: "For the thousand-year-old frontiers.") The nationalization of March 15th marked the beginning of the process of expropriation. The further the authorities went in turning the March 15th holiday to serve their own purposes, presenting flags, swearing in youths for pre-military training in the *levente* movement, the greater the popularity gained by the Opposition's interpretation and especially that of the Social Democrats. This was simply to associate the holiday with freedom and the welfare of the people. The Social Democratic Party—denounced by the Horthy regime as people without a country—referred to the traditions of the working men's

clubs in the Austro-Hungarian days. Democrats among the burghers of Budapest also grew dissatisfied with the official commemorations and arranged their own, usually at the statue of Petőfi on the Danube bank. That is where the most noteworthy March 15th opposition demonstration of the period took place in 1942, when speakers denounced fascism, hailed democracy and extolled the real interests of the Hungarian nation.

It is to the credit of the politicians of the Horthy regime that they faced up to the fact that March 15th could not be denied as a holiday. Recognizing realities was quite an accomplishment for a politician in senior office. In a wider context, recognizing reality is a virtue for anyone, especially in a country called Hungary. However it should not be forgotten that, having recognized the existence of this holiday after years of wrangling, politicians spared no effort to remould and expropriate it to their own tastes. Counter-commemorations, organized by the opposition show that the March 15th holiday was not in the long term allowed to be reduced to a nationalist and chauvinist jubilee. The government's attempts to expropriate it promoted the growth of its oppositional meaning.

Expropriated celebrations

In 1945, when the Red Army drove out the Germans and occupied Hungary, one of the first measures of the new, democratic government was to issue Prime Minister's Decree No. 1390/1945, declaring March 15th a national holiday. Fighting was still going on in some parts of the country as March 15th was observed in pacified regions. In the initial period, the various political forces that accepted (or pretended to accept) the rules of parliamentary democracy, staged joint commemorations. Some of the celebrations, however, namely those organized by the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), indicated that the process of expropriating the ideas attached to this holiday was once again under way. The MKP posed as an heir—in time, the sole heir—of the ideals of 1848. Certain individuals were selected who, after they had been given a new identity, could be referred to as proto-communists. Sándor Petőfi, Mihály Táncsics and Lajos Kossuth were those chosen to authenticate Hungary's Soviet-type communism on the strength of their role in the Hungarian national mythology of 1848. Naturally, the three had nothing to do with the function allotted to them, but were simply being used to lend the regime a much-desired political legitimation. By 1948, when the communists were nearly in full command, and when the centenary of the revolution was being observed, the image of these three had been entirely remoulded. Among the banners carried in procession, the portrait of the all-powerful leader of the Communist Party, Mátyás Rákosi, was flanked by those of Petőfi and Kossuth.

By 1949, after eliminating all rival parties and forcing the Social Democratic Party to merge with the MKP, communists (whose party was renamed as Hungarian Working People's Party, MDP), had gone further than any political

force before them in expropriating March 15th. There was not even as much left of liberalism as in the Horthy regime.

A few examples will illustrate the arrogance of the regime. With only five days to go before March 15th in 1951, the government issued a decree in which March 15th was struck out of the list of official holidays. Although March 15th continued to be marked in practice, and schools were closed on that day, the trappings were changed. The national colours of red, white and green were amply complemented with red, a colour which had nothing to do with March 15th but all the more with the regime of the day. The banners carried political slogans and the portraits included, in addition to Petőfi, Kossuth and Táncsics, those of Rákosi, Lenin and Stalin. The presence at March 15th celebrations of Lenin and Stalin was an historical paradox. Pure and simple, a visual realization of the theatre of the absurd, since in 1849 it was the intervention of the Russian czar that struck the final blow against the Hungarian drive for national independence. Again in 1956, the Stalinist oppressor, disguised as a Soviet ally, did the same to Hungary.

To come to terms with the ideology of the 1950s, Horvay's gloomy statue of Kossuth in front of the Parliament building had to be replaced in September 1952 by an optimistic counterpart by Zsigmond Stróbl Kisfaludy, András Kocsis and Lajos Ungvári. The monument—which still stands—includes a five metre tall Lajos Kossuth, flanked by a worker, a student and a peasant, all ready to attack the enemy. They exemplify the strength of the alliance of workers and peasants, cooperating with professional people—all in line with the ideology of the time. As the years went by, the statue started to subside. After being examined, experts discovered that the pedestal was hollow.

The revolution of 1956 (October 23rd—November 4th) proved the futility of all attempts to misuse March 15th. Although the drama was played out in autumn and not in March, the ideals of 1848 played a crucial role in the growing demand for destalinization and democratization, and then in the uprising itself. Other than the flag with a hole in place of the cut-out communist coat of arms, the revolutionaries used the symbols of 1848: a radical intellectuals' circle was named after Petőfi, the volunteers in the National Guard wore an armband in the national colours and the new coat of arms was that associated with Lajos Kossuth. The events of 1956 once again proved the futility of the attempts at expropriation under the Horthy regime and the aggressive campaign for the same purpose in the Rákosi era. Despite all these vicissitudes, March 15th, always a grass roots business and with an affinity to the opposition of the day, retained its time-honoured features. In the 1950s it survived because Hungary was not free. The politically oppressed people of an occupied country had no alternative but to refer to analogous ideals held under analogous conditions by earlier generations.

The revolutionaries of 1956, obviously, demanded that March 15th should again become an officially approved national holiday.

At first the politicians, installed in power by a mid-twentieth century "czarist" intervention, seemed to be wiser than their counterparts less than a century

before. (By contrast, the authorities in the nineteenth century did not call 1848-1849 a counterrevolution.) In December 1956 the government issued a decree restoring March 15th to the status of a national holiday. However, only a few months later, again just five days before March 15th, the holiday was demoted to the rank of a working day, although it was a holiday for all schools and institutes of education.

It became crystal clear that the regime of János Kádár, the newly installed leader of the Communist Party, acting in the spirit of its predecessor, failed to look on March 15th as a national holiday. The practice of expropriating the holiday also continued: the colour red was everywhere. But portraits of political leaders were no longer on show.

Year by year March 15th was officially observed, but without any genuine popular participation. Indifference began to set in, until members of the opposition organized alternative commemorations, particularly in 1971 and 1972, when young demonstrators were forcibly dispersed by police. In response, the ideological advisers to the government invented a new method of remoulding March 15th. They called this misbegotten freak "revolutionary youth days", which survived down to the mid-1980s. The fathers of this new "device" integrated into a single set of commemorations March 15th, March 21st —the day when communists took power in 1919—and April 4th, the day when fighting in the Second World War ended in Hungary. Those who fathered this scheme had noticed how closely these days fell in the calendar and attempted to find a common denominator for the three occasions. Hence the bizarre conjunction of Lajos Kossuth, Béla Kun and Marshal Malinovski.

As the official celebrations gradually lost popular appeal, from the early 1980s, the democratic opposition staged their counter-celebrations. Included was a procession from the statue of Petőfi to the statue of General Jozef Bem, the Polish hero of the 1848-49 Revolution in Hungary. The message conveyed by the procession was the inherent continuity between 1848, 1956 and the events of the 1980s, when popular clamour for democracy was becoming louder and louder. Once again, it became clear that March 15th is a holiday with a commitment to freedom and it cannot be expropriated by any government.

The conclusion drawn is not arbitrary. Suffice it to recall that in the 1970s and 1980s the locations where March 15th was commemorated teemed with uniformed and plainclothes policemen. Those who sent them knew, better than anyone else, that the expropriated holiday retained genuine social roots.

The holiday reduced in rank

The status of March 15th changed once again in the late 1980s. The government restored it to the position of official national holiday in 1988. The decision, "merely" thirty-one years in the making, indicated a decline in the rigour of the dictatorship. It showed a readiness to face the fact that for Hungarians this day had been a holiday ever since 1860, irrespective of the will of those in power.

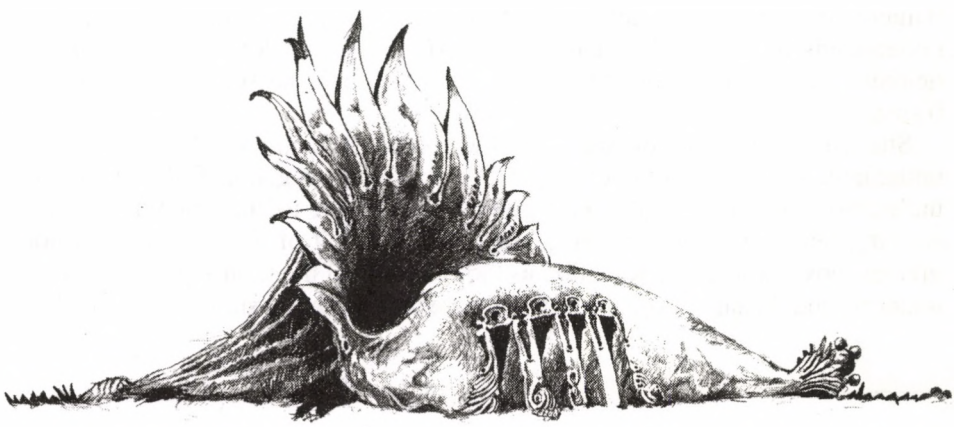
The final years of the eighties witnessed a climax in the history of the commemorating of the day. The people sensed the imminence of freedom, national independence and a democratic state. Hundreds of thousands turned up for celebrations to listen to addresses by people who, only two years before, had been harassed or even beaten up by the police. Banners carried demands for immediate change. Police were still out in strength but, in another bizarre twist of history, policemen wearing caps with the red star, pinned a cockade in the national colours on their jackets. One could only wonder whether policemen would act in the spirit of the red star or the cockade.

These huge March 15th commemorations took place without any confrontation, and hinted that the chance for a peaceful transition from dictatorship to Western democracy was there.

March 15th 1990, a few days before the first free elections in some forty years, showed that the rival political forces disagreed on the where and the how of its observance.

Later that year the freely elected multi-party Parliament discussed which day should be observed as the principal national holiday by a democratic and independent Republic of Hungary.

The choice was between three days: March 15th, October 23rd (the day the revolution of 1956 broke out) and August 20th associated with Saint Stephen the King, the founder of the Hungarian State. Although there was a free vote in Parliament, the majority chose August 20th. March 15th stayed an official holiday but of reduced rank. Now that the regime has changed, there does not seem to be as much need for it as there was in the changing of the regime.



Lajos Parti Nagy

Letter from Budapest: Wire Rain at the Opera House

I would surely humiliate her, though I do not know her and certainly misunderstand her, were I here to turn her lot, or her character, or what brought her to that point, or what will become of her into literature; if I were to imagine what sort of life she stepped out of, by pure chance ending up before me. I cannot dab with colour the events I wish to describe, or sketch them in a narrative. In fact there is really no story to be told, no framework or mould to shape the shame, a formless something with the taste of soap, both mine and hers, but the shame is a fact, and really is like a slate-grey, latherless soap that I can neither grab hold of nor slide aside, soap not washed away, not even touched, by the small-dropped, sharp wire-rain in front of the Opera House.

I am coming up out of the metro when she appears before me, silently, saying she'd like to ask me something. To ask without any hint of the empty self-abasement of dull routine, making it first possible, then necessary, for us to feel ashamed together, upon my very soul, if I fail to notice that her very carriage, and the fact of her being here, communicates to me that, even though at this moment, unfortunately, a huge gap separates us, still we are on the same side and, my dear Sir, there is only one side, not more. She presses a black, imitation-leather briefcase to her beige suede coat, a checkered threadbare winter skirt, she might be thirty and she might be fifty, says not a word but still understands me better than I understand her, she even knows that I can be neither too generous nor too base, since she holds herself to an absolute formality.

She does not count on the ploy's working—though its effectiveness is undeniable—but sets it out before me, bluntly calculating, hopefully, that I will understand, and if I don't, well goddamit, I ought to understand that her activity, her near fellow-citizenly manner, is a result of just the same (if not greater) poverty and consternation as the catatonia of those sitting down below underground. What's more, I must be aware that when she steps over to me it's

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nothing personal, it's only pro forma that she takes aim at my acquiescence, or perhaps my resistance. It's not mine that she's fighting, but her own in the first instance, yes, her awareness of her own poverty, long ago conquered in theory but now real, I should understand, please, and just write it up for her now, perhaps for the first time, trying herself out, not me, I'm just an extra here, a living subject, I must forgive her, since it all depends much less on me than on her when, finally, with an indifference grey as tin, she addresses me: "There is something I should like to ask you."

She might just as well want to ask me how to get to the Hajós utca entrance to the Opera, or the Writers' Bookshop, or the dental supply shop. This is obviously what I'm counting on when I bounce back with "What can I do for you?", and look at her attentively as tin. The flush on her cheeks could just as easily be an incipient drinker's flush, or a happy trace left by the nippy outdoors, or maybe too much time under sunlamps. Anyway, here we are still, looking into each other's eyes. Perhaps this properly noncommittal workaday look of mine doesn't even put her off—but why am I looking at her if I am unable to work out what she wants? I should have been able to see that and feel it, sparing her that simple tattered sentence, her request, which will soon make our relationship obvious. If I would only understand this, then I could spare her this fighting back the sobs from the lump in her throat, giving voice to her mushy, inarticulate request: "Ambeginia."

I shake my head. "I'm sorry, I don't understand", and a blush begins to fill her fallen-leaf face, a helpless anger, and here she is, caught in flagranti, there was no point in her grinding that sentence to the bone the first time. She begins again, "Misrambeginia." We both blush, as after some clumsy, tasteless joke, but I still think there's just some little communication problem here, and see that she sees that's all I think, and she panics, because for her—and, as I will soon see, for myself as well—this is all getting very uncomfortable as it draws on, souring.

Maybe she was ready to flee, when it occurs to me that she might just want to know the time. "Ah, the time." I look at my watch, but at this gesture she blushes to the roots of her dangling hair, now thoroughly perplexed, even vengeful and peevish (if such a word is in place here) at me for teasing and sporting with her so, and at this she would reassume the role she had prepared, except that she sees I truly don't understand, that there's no use in saying "Misrambeginia" for a third time. Finally, she looks at me, sharp and black as Bakelite, but not right at me, maybe she thinks—she must think—that I'm not looking at her, that I don't understand what is by now long obvious, "I'm sorry, but I still don't understand," I say, not even to her.

And then, because at this point we've moved beyond mere embarrassment, I show her a closed, narrow look that asks for forgiveness, indicating that I am slow on the uptake. At this, she grimaces the tears back into her throat, and we nearly laugh, and at that moment, getting me to understand is almost more important to her than what she had wanted to say, and what had made this entire scene in the lightening rain so insoluble, so pitiful, and she says to me,

breaking the words down into syllables at my forehead, little-girlishly, "I am beg-ging", and blows a sigh of relief, and repeats, jabbering in explanation, like someone who has pulled it off and come down from the ninth floor with her coat spread wide, "My dear Sir, I am, de facto, a beggar." I am as red as she is. "Forgive me," I say, and reach into my pocket for some change. I'm fumbling through my coins. The rain is pouring off us. And from this point we no longer look at one another. "Thank you," she says, as if she had really just asked for the time. "It's nothing", I say, as if telling her it was ten fifteen. We hurry off, the two of us, pedestrians in front of the Opera House. In fact I could say we both fled.

Bálint András Varga

Letter from Berlin

Berlin is a fascinating place to live in. Quite a sweeping statement to make and Berliners would be the first to deny it. They are right of course if they live in the Eastern half of the city and have lost their job, or their workplace is about to be wound up—or indeed, if they have a reasonably secure job but are paid 60 per cent of what their colleagues make on the other side of the no longer existent wall.

If you are prepared (or can afford) to forget about all that, Berlin is a fascinating place to live in. It is surrounded by a string of lakes with not a trace of human habitation in sight. You can walk around lakes within the city itself, a few minutes drive from the Ku'Damm, and take deep breaths of genuinely fresh air.

And you can buy any of the "What's On" type of magazines (such as *TIP, Prinz, Zitty, Berlin Programm*) and take your pick among dozens of cultural attractions. On a weekend, there are twenty—odd musical events to choose from, two dozen theatres offer interesting fare, not to mention the innumerable cinemas, museums and galleries.

What makes Berlin possibly unique among the cultural centres of the world is that its three opera houses (two in what was East Berlin: the Staatsoper Unter den Linden and the Komische Oper and the Deutsche Oper in the West maintain consciously overlapping repertoires. In fact, you do get people who are prepared to compare the three different productions of *The Magic Flute* to draw their own conclusions—and, as Hans Jochen Genzel, *Dramaturge* of the Komische Oper, assured me, all three are consistently sold out. *The Barber of Seville*, or the *Marriage of Figaro*—or indeed, the *Merry Wives of Windsor* are on the repertoire of two of the three houses. Of course, the bulk of their programmes are different—the Deutsche Oper having probably been the most enterprising of them. This may well change in the near future as Daniel Barenboim takes over the Staatsoper and puts his personal stamp on its character. Little has transpired of his plans so far; he has, however, dismissed many of the singers through his newly appointed *Intendant*, Georg Quander.

While the *Intendants* of the three opera houses do get together at regular intervals to coordinate their long–term plans, those of the Berlin orchestras do not bother to do so. As Elmar Weingarten of the Rundfunk—Symphonie—Orchester put it: "If I have Günther Wand to conduct the Bruckner Fifth Symphony, I could not care less if X or Y is doing the same piece the same week or even the very same night. If I have a less prominent figure conducting, I might give some of my colleagues a ring to find out if they are having the same piece in the same period."

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Early in March, for instance, Claudio Abbado conducted the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic.The soloist may not have been all that well known (Maxim Vengerov of Russia) but the Sinfonisches Orchester Berlin, which programmed the same work on the same day (Borislav Ivanov of Sofia conducting, with Lukas David as soloist), was simply no match. A few days later, both orchestras performed Beethoven's Sixth — again, no question which hall was sold out.

In addition to the well-known orchestras, (to which category belong those of the three opera houses, such as the Staatskapelle, which occupies the pit of the Staatsoper), there are many others as well competing for attention and subsidies. This incomplete list has simply been culled from the listings magazine for March: Deutsches Kammerorchester, Neue Kammersolisten Berlin, Neues Kammerorchester, Kammerorchester C.P.E. Bach, Berliner Barock Orchester. A list that is by no means complete. On 8 March, 1992 there were twenty–one concerts in Berlin between 10.30 a.m. and 10 p.m. They included such attractions as a guest appearance of the Peking Opera House at one of the academies, the Hochschule der Künste. The three million or so people that make up the population of the re–united city have a standing invitation to a feast of the arts day after day, practically every day of the year.

Of course, most of the events still take place in West Berlin. The concerts of the Berlin Philharmonic in East Berlin's Schauspielhaus have helped to tip the balance somewhat, but now that the concert hall—the Philharmonie—is due to be reopened in the West, a new role will have to be found for the huge house in the Gendarmenmarkt. (The Philharmonie, designed by Hans Scharoun and built in 1960–63, had to be closed down some two years ago, after cracks had been discovered in its roof.) The Berlin Philharmonic has been forced to play in the adjacent chamber hall (Kammermusiksaal, built 1984–87) which can only take a Mozart–sized orchestra. The full ensemble has been appearing in East Berlin's Schauspielhaus, which is noted for its poor acoustics. Clearly, the moment the Philharmonie is re–opened (in April, with Schoenberg's *Gurre–Lieder*) the orchestra will return home with a sigh of relief. The Schauspielhaus will continue to serve as the seat of the Berliner Sinfonie–Orchester (not to be confused with the Sinfonisches Orchester Berlin), but that will hardly suffice as a *raison d'être* for a building of that size. An *Intendant* has duly been appointed in the person of Peter Schneider, whose job it is to devise a new role for the Schauspielhaus to play. One of his plans is actually a large Finno–Ugric Festival in November 1994, with orchestral and chamber concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and so on. Hungary will of course be given a prominent part in this.

The Finno–Ugric Festival is just a modest example of what Berlin can do once a suitable subject is found. The dimensions of Berlin festivals can be simply breathtaking. For one thing, they encompass several months and numerous venues; for another, every conceivable genre is incorporated and presented as a package to an awe–struck public. The India Festival, for instance, included not only exhibitions of mind—boggling variety and interest, there were also theatre performances, dance and chamber groups (including the Calcutta Trio from Budapest). There was even a street festival with several stages set up side by side, programmes running simultaneously.

The festival Patterns of Jewish Life was similarly ambitious. The exhibition mounted in the Martin Gropius Bau was five years in gestation! The amount of work invested in the preparation simply cannot be gauged by the visitor. Two books have been published. One is a vol-

ume of essays treating relevant subjects and one which is a guide to the exhibits, lavishly illustrated, of course. The other is a handy guide, just the right size to fit into your pocket, which helps you to find your way among the two thousand five hundred (!) objects on display. But this extraordinary exhibition is just one of the many events grouped under the umbrella of the Jewish festival. Performances of an Israeli theatre in the Maxim Gorki Theater were sold out—as were the concerts of the Epstein Brothers, who played *Klezmer* music, or of the Israeli singers, who presented Jewish songs from Morocco and Turkey.

The same is true of Berlin's Hungarian festival, *grenzenlos* ("without frontiers"), with programmes between September 1991 and March 1992. Once again, exhibitions, concerts, films, lectures, theatre performances, conversations in public with writers, cover a large segment of Hungary's traditional and avant–garde arts, at a great many venues all over Berlin, East and West.

But let me draw attention to my point: the India Festival, the Patterns of Jewish Life and *grenzenlos* all took place simultaneously! And, of course, Berlin had its normal fare of attractions which include, as I have been pointing out, performances at three opera houses, the Berlin Philharmonic concerts under Abbado, Giulini and Barenboim, as well as all the other concerts and theatre productions and films and...

Berlin, as I have said, is a fascinating place to live in. But sometimes you throw up your hands in despair.

Ádám Nádasdy

English at the University

English studies in Hungarian universities came to a symbolic turning point last year: for the first time ever, more applicants wanted to read English at university than any other arts subject, including Hungarian, History or German. That margin was small, but this year English is in third position immediately behind Hungarian and History. Thus the fact remains that there is tremendous interest in studying for a degree in English. Unfortunately, only a fraction of applicants are admitted to the highly traditional degree courses (12-15 per cent in Budapest, somewhat more elsewhere), the rest may transfer to another university or a College of Education. For various reasons, however, each year a number of applicants fail to get a place in any institution. This is all the more deplorable since the market would be able to take up a much larger number of English graduates.The bottleneck is the capacity of the higher education institutions.

The present article surveys the situation of only those courses for arts students who seek a degree in English. Needless to say, those studying other subjects, like History, Medicine, Law, Business, etc., also require large-scale English tuition, and they get it to varying degrees. The tradition in Hungary, however, is to have these "non-degree courses" handled by different institutions (usually called lectorates), residing in the institution whose students they teach. Thus for example, in Budapest, there is a Language Lectorate at the Faculty of Law, another one at the University of Medicine, there is a Language Institute at the University of Economics, and so on. (Note that in Hungary the institutions often take the form of separate Universities rather than Faculties or Schools of the same university: for example, there is no University of Budapest but seven or eight Universities around the city. These, however, complement each other and make up what in other countries would be called one university.)

Up to two years ago, there were two types of degree course in English available in Hungary: one at the universities (which we shall call "philology course") and one at the colleges of education ("college course"). Both courses were obligatorily coupled with teacher training, from which university students

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could ask to be exempted and receive a non-teaching philology degree, though most of them went through the teacher training component too. This has changed now: philology students, aiming at a teacher's degree, have to sign up for this and do the educational subjects (pedagogy, psychology, etc.) on top of their English philology obligations. In the colleges of education, whose basic aim is teacher training, there is no such option, of course.

The traditional idea was that with a university degree you ended up teaching 11-to-18-year-olds, especially secondary schools and in particular the traditional grammar-school type *gimnázium*, while a college degree would entitle you to teach children up to the age of 14 only, in what is called the "general school" *(általános iskola)* . Life has long blurred these distinctions, however. University graduates in English have been finding many other job opportunities, especially in the capital and the bigger cities, which pay much better than public education: commerce, public relations, diplomatic service, tourism, the media, and, in the last seven or eight years, private language schools. College graduates may also be working in these jobs, but most of them teach English in public education, often filling posts "intended for" university graduates. Many secondary schools employ English teachers with a college degree because they have no applicants with a university degree. (This may be a blessing in disguise: often a college graduate will make a better language teacher, since the colleges take teacher training much more seriously. But efficiency and prestige are two different things.)

Over-regulatory as it was, even the previous régime in Hungary refrained from "directing" fresh graduates into jobs: apart from a few abortive attempts (the last one around 1977), the authorities left people alone to find work where they could. With the advent of a more democratic system, such coercion is completely out of the question. It is not even obligatory to seek a permanent place of employment now, thus freelancing has emerged as a completely decent and acceptable option. The business, economic, as well as state and municipal, administration sectors badly need graduates whose English is good and who have an international outlook: they obviously find them largely among those graduating in English.

At the same time, there is a disastrous shortage of English teachers in Hungarian schools. For many years it has been prescribed by law that pupils in all schools must study a foreign language, while those in a *gimnázium* must study two. Up to 1989, Russian had the status of "first foreign language", which meant in practice that everybody studied Russian, and grammar school pupils had a "second (i.e., Western) foreign language" as well. Every school had at least one Russian teacher, but very few "general schools" had an English teacher at all. During 1989, the status of Russian changed, the labels "first" and "second" were abolished, and it was left to the heads of schools to decide what language or languages to offer. Most schools, in agreement with—or under the fierce pressure of—pupils and their parents, decided to replace Russian with English. They are even prepared to offer unusually large salaries or extra bonuses to entice staff to them (duly angering the other teachers), but even so,

most schools have been simply unable to find people able or willing to teach English, let alone someone with a degree in teaching English as a foreign language.

The existing institutions (philology courses and college courses taken together) have traditionally admitted altogether about 700 students a year in Hungary. This is barely enough to replace retiring teachers, but not to provide the thousands that are needed urgently. In 1990 the Ministry of Education, with strong financial support from the PHARE programme and the British Council, and backed by the US Peace Corps, launched a new type of degree course to train teachers of English quickly and efficiently, giving a relatively modest degree based exclusively on teaching English as a foreign language, a degree which would not open too many other career possibilities to graduates. To this purpose five new institutions—called Centres for English Teacher Training (CETT)—were set up in conjunction with existing university English departments in Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged, Pécs, and Veszprém, and the British Council launched its English Language Teaching Support Scheme (ELTSUP), to maintain the professional standards of these centres. Between them, the five centres admit about 500 students every year to their courses. Thus the ELTSUP project has almost doubled the number of Hungarian students who can get into higher education to read English.

The CETT course is condensed into three years. Students are not allowed to couple it with another degree-level course (as opposed to philology students, who may, and college students, who must, couple their English with another major subject). The legal status of the degree obtained under CETT aegis is that of a college-level degree, but the Ministry accepts these graduates as proficient to teach English at whatever level and to whatever age. (This acceptance has more symbolic than practical significance, as we have seen above: headmasters employ whoever they can.) It remains to be seen whether these people will indeed take up teaching jobs or whether the appeal of business, industry and the media continues to override considerations of patriotic duty or vocational inclination.

While these new opportunities are welcomed by everybody, the philology course continues to attract the largest number and the best of those intending to read English. In the Department of English Language and Literature (DELL), of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, there are now 680 philology students, who basically follow a four-plus-one-year course (the plus one year being teaching practice or thesis research). Each year 150 new students are now being admitted, but numbers of applications are much higher (around 1000 or more), and selection—with all the painstaking efforts of the examining staff—is hopelessly difficult and inevitably unreliable.

The philology course offered by DELL is composed of 45 "study units" (exams or course marks), of which 13 must be in English Studies (British literature, history, art, etc.), 12 in English Linguistics, 4 in American Studies, 9 in Language Practice and Proficiency, the rest freely chosen, with 5 units in Applied Linguistics and Methodology being compulsory if you want a teach-

er's degree. Students spend a weekly average of 9-13 hours in their English classes.

Over the last year DELL, along with the entire Faculty of Arts at Eötvös Loránd, has modularized its courses: students may decide—within reasonable limits—which course they take first and which next, what they cover in the autumn term and what in the spring. With a huge department like ours, this has actually made things easier, since we no longer have to provide classes in any one subject at the same time, but may spread our courses over both terms, or even three or four terms, expecting the students' choice to spread evenly too. The first such year has just come to an end: it has seemed chaotic, but one must wait for the dust to settle.

The teaching staff is large. DELL has 55 full-time teaching positions, 4 teaching assistants, 10 PhD students (who receive their grants from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), and a number of "private" lecturers, i.e., people who get no fee (or a symbolic "hourly fee") but find it rewarding to teach some specialized course (usually on some topic that staff members do not offer, e.g., Canadian Studies).With librarians and administrative staff, altogether 93 people are connected to DELL on a non-student basis.

The department moved to spacious new premises in 1990—new to us, but earlier the Political Academy of the Communist Party, still earlier the Sacré Coeur convent and girls' school. Notorious shortages of classroom and office room space have disappeared. We offer many of our classes in small groups: the average size was 13.5 students per group. This is a point of heated debate: some colleagues say this figure is dangerously higher than the ideal 12, while others think that we could well raise the average to 16 or even 20 (which is widely accepted in many countries), and by doing so we could raise the number of students we can admit—which is a top priority. Yes, say the opponents, but English is a foreign language to most of our students, and though they understand English well, it is not enough for them to *listen* to English, but they need to actively engage in discussion and debate, which cannot realistically be expected if the group size is above 12. Raising groups sizes would, accordingly, mean a slump in the quality of education we provide. "What does the taxpayer want for his money?", we ask in our new Western style, "fewer graduates but of top quality, or more graduates with a thinner education?"

The problem is that under the present system of financing, an increase in the number of students would not automatically raise the money channelled into the university (let alone the Department). Students pay no tuition fees, and the universities receive a yearly lump sum from the state. Thus the department is not interested in admitting more students, since that would mean more work without an increase in financial resources.We feel somewhat like the waiter in a good old Soviet restaurant: not too many patrons, please! As long as financing is not more quota-sensitive, we are—paradoxically, even cynically—interested in keeping up the *numerus clausus*.

American Studies have seen a spectacular expansion over the last three or four years. There is now a separate American Section within the Faculty (soon

to become a full-fledged Department). All students of English have had to include a small American component towards their degree, now those interested can sign up for an American Studies degree course (with or without continuing their studies of English Philology). This course, now in its third year, admits about 25 or 30 students yearly. As of this year, DELL is offering an Australian Studies Programme in the form of a specialization within the English degree and duly honoured with a Certificate. Canadian Studies has been present for some years now as a standard item on our elective menu: we are planning to launch a Canadian Studies Programme from September.

The Hungarian legislature is to pass a Higher Education Act this summer, to become effective from September 1993. This will change many things, and introduce a new form of financing. The most heated debate about the future structure of higher education, however, concerns the recognized levels of study. Thus far, universities have handed out a unified degree, which was neither BA nor MA, and there was no organized postgraduate education. A debate is going on whether to equate the degree now given to a BA (which it clearly surpasses) and start offering MA courses to fewer but more ambitious students, whose MA would then have a universally recognized value—or whether we shall call the present degree MA (there is some vague tradition supporting this), and let the Colleges hand out the equivalent of a BA. However, hallmarking every university degree as an MA would have a strongly inflatory effect, and we would run the danger of having the world look at our many MAs with suspicion. Furthermore, if every student we admit is admitted to the MA course right from the start, not getting an MA would count as failure—which people do not like and even teachers shun. It would therefore be better, at least in the eyes of the present writer, to admit all university students to a BA course first, award a BA degree to all who complete their studies, say goodbye to most of them, and re-admit a small number for further study. In such a two-tier system the first tier would not be so constrained in the numbers admitted, since courses would not be so highly specialized and could be given by junior or less qualified staff. In the second tier, after students had shown their abilities during their BA years, strict selection could be supported both on moral and financial grounds.

It seems, however, that this two-tier system will not win large enough support to be enacted in the new Higher Education Act. We may soon find ourselves in the situation of Italian universities in the sixties, with not 13.5 or 16 or 20, but 150 or 200 students sitting in a "discussion group" or "language practical". Gone are the totalitarian days of seclusive élitism: this is a poor country, and a democratic one too (a difficult combination), which cannot insist on élite education when large numbers are not getting any education. Sitting in any classroom is better than queuing for unemployment benefit—sitting in the English classroom holds out the prospect of a secure job for at least two or three decades to come.

Miklós Györffy

From Vienna to Budapest

Miklós Szentkuthy: *Barokk Róbert* (Robert Baroque). Jelenkor Irodalmi és Művészeti Kiadó, 1991, 308 pp.; Miklós Hernádi: *Otto.* Magvető, 1990, 425 pp.; Péter Esterházy: *Hahn-Hahn grófnő pillantása* (The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn). Magvető, 1991, 264 pp.

Four years ago, almost coinciding with his death, Miklós Szentkuthy's (1908-1988) autobiographical *Frivolitások és hitvallások* (Frivolities and Confessions) was published. He there mentions *Robert Baroque*, an unpublished novel, written in his youth. Szentkuthy, who is now, with the publication of three of his novels, becoming known in France, relates that he wrote it at the age of nineteen and had not read it since, let alone thought of publishing it. *Robert Baroque* has since been found amongst the author's papers and published. After sixty years, Szentkuthy had all but forgotten the book's contents, which is made clear in his assertion in his autobiography, that *Robert Baroque* is about his father, "because even then I was anxious, angered, and frightened by the immeasurable distance between this eccentric and, so to speak, normal people. My colleagues, schoolmates, and fellow students at university all had fathers who were men among men, but mine was somehow mystical, insulated, a bizarrely esoteric oddity." As it happens, though, not only is *Robert Baroque* not about his father (though a more or less "normal" father figures therein), but, as the title suggests, its subject is the boy himself: virtually the only presence in the book is the boy's spiritual and imaginary world, his aspiring writer's narrative voice. The publisher even felt it necessary to suppress, in the back cover of a 1988 volume of Szentkuthy interviews, a misleading citation from *Frivolities,* where Szentkuthy is quoted as saying, "I wrote a long novel about my father."

Another of Szentkuthy's assertions in *Frivolities* is that "at the time, I had not the remotest intention of publishing anything." This is similarly given the lie by the just-published book, in which the eponymous schoolboy character thinks about virtually nothing other than the various things he would like to write—and publish, of course, for he also gives systematic attention to the critical reception they would receive. Of course, six years were still to pass before the appearance of Szentkuthy's first published work, *Prae* (1934), but this behemoth of a novel, with its Joycean echoes, indicates all the more strongly Szentkuthy's own aspirations to become a novelist.

But being familiar with Szentkuthy's hugely comical, play-acting personality, such misrememberings could easily be intentional mystifications or bluffs. The reader of *Robert Baroque* suspects as much: not only did Szentkuthy reread it,

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he even corrected it and added some final touches. Indeed one suspects that the mature writer, working on the basis of an early novel or outline, produced a work which imitates the voice, world and style of an over-enthusiastic beginner. This is all groundless speculation of course, based only on the palpable presence of Szentkuthy's gift of the gab and comic play-acting even in this youthful work. In addition, *Robert Baroque* exhibits such tremendous learning, such mature and original writing, that one could hardly imagine it from the pen of a nineteen-year-old tiro. On the one hand, it is a typical work of a young writer, even an adolescent, unsystematic and unshaped, overburdened with personal problems, and outpourings of the heart. At the same time, it is a bewilderingly mature Szentkuthy creation, clearly stamped with the distinctive mark of his mature voice and universe. There are occasional reminiscences—sometimes word-for-word—of the spirit and conception of *Frivolities* of sixty years later, as if we were dealing with all those beliefs, that narcissistic, even exhibitionistic self-dissection. *Robert Baroque* is fundamentally a writer's diary, the wonderfully imaginative and ambitious observations of a breath-takingly well-read aspiring writer near the end of his secondary school days, concerning the unity of literature, and his life, which skirts the fringe of the quotidian banalities of bourgeois existence. This epic framework conveys a typically Szentkuthyan ingeniousness and pose, which transcend the usual adolescent self-stylization: Szentkuthy-Baroque, in his entirely unnovelistic novel, writes of all that he *might* write or, rather, of all that he is not writing as a consequence of his doubts, crises, and inhibitions. In doing so, he presents a diary of his plans, his failures, his feelings and spiritual experiences, and gives room for scenes distorted by a hyperactive emotionality and grotesque exaggeration.

Robert Baroque is a boy of humble middle class background in the Budapest of the mid-twenties. As he is tossed between the "great" temptations of eroticism and religion, an occasional meeting with a girl, or a priest, reflects his internal crisis. But the weightiest events take place in his imagination, stimulated by his readings. In *Frivolities* Szentkuthy explains the source of Robert's family name: "As a schoolboy, I often borrowed works of literature from the City Library. The rule there was that if one borrowed a work of literature, one was required, at the same time, to take out a so-called 'educational' book. In some mysterious way or another, I already knew German at the time—I may have been in my final year—, and I took out Wölfflin's *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, which had an extraordinary effect on me. This was one of my life's umpteen decisive moments. This 'educational' book dealt fairly extensively with the Baroque, and the word stuck in my head."

Szentkuthy portrays his youthful self in the suffering pose of the saints on Baroque altars, and while he doubtless had profound and passionate moments of genuine rapture then and later, the comic writer was nonetheless more drawn towards literary, art-historical, and dramatic forms, to stage-sets and masks, to spectacle and mimicry. His brash stylistic ploys, as early as *Robert Baroque,* herald a great comic talent, which here is all the more grotesque since we must somehow place this in the context of the image of a naive and enthusiastic schoolboy. The mature author, looking back, denies that this work had any ironic intention: whether the young author intended this or not, there is an irresistible ironic charm in the grotesque tension brought about by his colossal ambition, doubts and torments, worthy of a saint, as all the while his manner of expression evinces with a sensuous luxury, ever at the ready to find itself a literary guise.

Robert Baroque, in true Baroque fashion, is crowded, bombastic and mannered, a textual composition of unfathomable construction, yet wherever one looks in it, one is enchanted and fascinated to find that it already contains all the elements of the later author's make-up.

Miklós Hernádi's novel, *Otto,* also deals with a young man of genius. The protagonist is Otto Weininger, a promising fin-de-siècle Viennese thinker whose only work, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, was a great *succés de scandale* after its publication in 1903. He committed suicide at twenty-three. This is at any rate what his contemporaries thought, and what is generally held today. Hernádi, though, presents sound arguments to suggest that Weininger was very likely murdered.

Otto is not so much the protagonist of Hernádi's novel as its subject, its protagonist is more properly Lieutenant Maximilian Barner of the National Minorities Department of the Political Police. Given his close attention to his duties, he has noticed that the supposed circumstances of Weininger's death had not been clarified in the prescribed manner. He begins to search for the truth. In a manner of speaking, we are dealing with crime fiction of a high quality, since Hernádi's book is primarily a detailed description of this long and difficult investigation. But the author is not content with just this. He presents the reader with Weininger and his views, and proceeds to locate the entire affair within a framework of the Zionist, anarchist, and socialist movements which were interwoven in turn-of-the-century Europe. This is all grounded in serious research into sources and historical documentation. The result is a novel with a layer of detective fiction, several inserted essays, and a historical documentary, all clearly distinguishable.

The larger historical context is particularly interesting, since Weininger's place within it is a fiction, a supposition of the author's. This is the source of suspense within the novel, its playful or serious gambit: did internal conflicts within the Zionist movement have something to do with Otto's death? Lieutenant Barner, the upright, well-intentioned, competent, yet restricted representative of the Habsburg Empire, has no *point d'appui* , he and the reader together, on the basis of investigative findings, through logical deductions, come to pose this question. The author leads him by the hand through this investigation, it is he, the writer, who has some suspicion or knowledge pertaining to this affair, with which he furnishes Barner, his hero.

But what does the author know, and how? Miklós Hernádi does not show his hand, he does not say whether he has some historical basis for his assumption or whether we are dealing with a device by a writer of fiction. He suggests the possibility that Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism who subordinated religious and national issues to social ones, may have become an obstacle to leftist social-anarcho Russian Jews, who employ two terrorists to carry out an attempt on his life. Part of the plan would have been to divert suspicion to Weininger, from whose work it was known that, in spite of his Jewishness, he held antisemitic views. One of the terrorists, a young Russian Jewess, insinuates her way into Otto's confidence, indeed there are signs that she falls in love with him, though he was a confirmed misogynist. According to the murder-thesis, Otto had to die because Herzl's assassination had failed, and Otto knew too much about the assassins' true intentions and identities. So they killed him instead.

With Barner, Hernádi has put together a flawless logical structure, one which allows the possibility of refutation, since even though Barner discovers the crime, and working beyond the line of duty, the criminals as well, confronting them with a

seamless case against them—they nevertheless have counterarguments to support their alibi. Ultimately, though, they decide to knock out this overzealous, pesky detective with a naive faith in the power of truth, whose discoveries inspire no curiosity, least of all in his superiors, who do not want this matter to trouble the murky waters of their political manoeuverings.

Using authentic or, seemingly authentic, facts and texts and arguments based on them, Hernádi effectively brings to life the trial, which did not take place after Otto Weininger's death. But since the great majority of readers are unable to distinguish between the "true" information and the suppositions, or even pure inventions, we cannot properly judge the value of Barner's discovery. On the one hand, this is a fascinating, relativizing aspect, but at the same time, it tends to weaken the elements of essay and history in the book. At any rate, the question of whether Otto Weininger's death was due to suicide or murder is scarcely pressing these days. Still, if a novel such as this, presenting itself as an informed treatment of the issue, fails to tell us whether the murder theory is in fact credible, we can only be embarrassed or disappointed.

I admit that it may not have been the author's intention to make Weininger the protagonist, of even the subject, of his novel, which is really about Barner, about the Habsburg Empire and its officials, about that world in which the distinction between reality and imagination or dream was a fuzzy one. If that is its purpose, other writers of the age are more successful conveyors of that atmosphere. Here we must be content with a crime story, and a good one at that. The book may perhaps be somewhat overloaded with learned ballast, but if Umberto Eco was able to get away with much more than this in *The Name of the Rose*, then why cannot Hernádi be permitted to flesh out Barner's investigation with a bit of *couleur locale*?

Péter Esterházy's new novel is called *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn*. A lecture of that title appears in *A halacska csodálatos élete* (The Little Fish's Wonderful Life), a volume of essays he has recently published. There adds this meditation on novel writing:

"The evil Heine mentions the Countess Hahn-Hahn in discussing women writers, about whom he establishes that they have one eye on the page, and another on a man—except for Countess Hahn-Hahn, who is one-eyed. *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* is the title of the novel because I became jealous of that glance, the all-penetrating gaze of that blind eye. There are novels whose writers, in contrast, strive to procure for themselves the best possible telescopes, to assert that this is what the world is like. But the books I love tend to be of a questioning mode, and if they find themselves forced to say anything at all, it is: let the world not be like this."

Countess Hahn-Hahn is actually about the Danube. Its protagonist is the Traveller, as distinguished from the tourist. The Traveller is in no hurry, and travels professionally: he can be hired to travel. "Once in a while a colourful gentleman or run-down country would retain his services, and he would set out on a trip." Usually it was the latter case; Hungary or, rather, the Hungarian reader, must have commissioned him to travel the length of the Danube and write a novel about it. The novel systematically records the exchange of telegrams between the Hirer and the Traveller (the Hired) pertaining to disagreements which crop up in the course of the commission (the Traveller, for example, doesn't write in the way, or about the place, that his Hirer expected). The Traveller honourably travels the length of the Danube, although with one stipulation: "I will decide what constitutes 'the Danube'." So, in the guise of a travelling reporter, he wanders off at every point. ("Our ambitious plans call for the

novel to be an historical book, a romantic book, a Central European satirical book, an anti-Magris book, a travel book, a restaurant guidebook, a chaos book, a book book.") Perhaps the Hirer-Reader (especially if he is Serbian, Rumanian, or Bulgarian) might take issue with the reporter's devoting considerably more generous treatment to the "wealthy" Danube, which reaches down as far as Budapest, than to the "poor" Danube, which extends downriver from there (if we mean "Danube" in the commonly accepted sense). No two ways about it: the Traveller has skipped out on the lower Danube.

Neither is it easy to determine just who this Traveller is. Certainly he is a persona close to the author, a *mélange* of various layers of his life, including his boyhood and his present self. There is more than one suggestion that the Voyage is to some degree a metaphor for Writing: "Do I understand that the young gentleman wishes to put the Danube into words?", asks one of the characters, of an identity that is equally mingled and many-layered. "Or is it the other way around, that he wants to build a Danube out of words?" Among the Traveller's experiences, which are expressed in the form of narrative études, there are quite a few recognizably autobiographical episodes, though occasionally drawn as dream-like or in terms of certain literary clichés. In the same vein, we see aspects of the author in the persona of the young Traveller's guide Roberto, a distant relation, deported by the communists as an aristocrat, then employed by them as an agent, and who then, to lead the whole world by the nose, becomes a double agent, until such time as he falls in love with a woman in Vienna and withdraws from this exhausting and dangerous existence.

Roberto and his story are typical products of the Danube region, and Esterházy's Danube-story is ultimately built on a montage of regional personages, episodes, historical material, and aperçus. "Regional", of course, in the broadest sense, determined by the author. Sometimes the voyage is one of experience, sometimes one of the imagination, leading to the main stages of its course: Donaueschingen, Ulm, Vienna, Budapest. The profound and mysterious force behind the episodes and meditations on this geographical framework, the red herrings of books in the "bibliography", is the gaze of the Countess, that imaginary eye which sees not what is, but what is no more. This turns the work into a voyage, a discovery.

"My voyage of discovery seeks, in examining the traces of surviving happiness, to survey its misery. In order to know how great a darkness surrounds you, you must look with sharp eyes at the glimmering lights in the distance."

Gergely Hajdú

Spinning Their Webs

Péter Kántor: *Napló 1987-1989* (Journal 1987-1989). Orpheus, 1991, 103 pp; Zsófia Balla: *A páncél nyomai* (The Marks of the Armour), Kriterion, Bucharest, 1991, 79 pp; László Baránszky: *Menetközben* (En Route). Magvető, 1991, 101 pp; Sándor Rákos: *Csörte* (Bout). Szépirodalmi, 1991, 107 pp.

Péter Kántor's (born 1949) poems are currently mainstream. They bring to mind Szabolcs Várady and Endre Kukorelly in that Kántor considers any aspect of the tradition to be serviceable, employing an ironic and playful extravagance, so as to avoid any charge of automatic exploitation. In "Viewers of the Mesh" (the TV), he resorts to irony (though not without compassion) when seeing the "one man" language of the half-wits gabbling in the street to be successful, for it is a language in which "they have scrambled / that which the avantgarde poets / could always only wish for: / the whole thing, just as it is, / or almost like it—...". Like the front-rank poets just mentioned, Kántor concentrates on his personal experiences and on what can be deduced from them, without turning to communal ideologies—the experience of his generation. Thus the title *Journal* for Kántor's fifth volume is not surprising. For a very long time, this was the first (and to date, the last) year which created an experience which was truly national. Kántor treats this material, which is in marked contrast with his previous work, with the same validity, and he has found a strangely fitting tone for all this—that of a kind of nostalgia.

Ancien régimes tend to indulge in nostalgia. (In Hungarian literature, few writers have had a stronger role in shaping general culture than Gyula Krúdy, whose fiction idealized the dark 1850s. Of course, the conjuring up of the past by Krúdy and writers like him is far from naive, for it expresses the dissatisfaction and aversion felt for the present.) To find that certain *douceur de vivre* in the oppressingly petty Kádár era, and to find it without distorting reality, is an amazing accomplishment. The explanation does not lie in his raw material, though it is true that Kántor did not make what *ex post facto* could be judged to have been futile efforts: he "merely" lived, as well as he could. Of course, he does not deny the workaday day to day pettiness, least of all when, shamming naiveté, he ignores it ("Pest Bridge Abutment Blues"). But one has to take the epigraph he uses (by Sándor Weöres) seriously: "like a spider, within our own hearts / we spin our web around us". It is mainly the inner events; precisely because they could be linked with true emotions, the typical facts of the old days assume an aura of authenticity in retrospect. It was not beauty that those living among these facts encountered most

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rarely; it was—contrary to the notion that this was "existing socialism"—the feeling that all these things "existed in reality".

Kántor makes use of both textual references and visceral feelings to modulate his most frequent themes: sober resignation and a passionate will to live, grief (in the mourning poems of the middle section), and the hard-confessed joy in survival. The tone occasionally bears an amazing resemblance to that of a hit-tune: he uses puns ("*nélküledőben*", something like "without-you-ing"), forced rhymes and banal details that come close to self-parody, as counterpoints to his most serious sections. (Some typical, disillusionizing lines from "In the Courtyard of Sound" complain about the passing of things: "As if crunchingly hatching from an egg, / the sounds rattle in major and minor, / and all about the same thing: how the mash ferments." Such concise self-parody can only refer to something which becomes evident in the *Journal*: a heightened sense of vulnerability.

Thanks to Kántor's bent for radical self-exposure, the reader is fully aware of the few kernels of experience concealed in the poems. He often returns to an event, elevating it to a symbol of vulnerability, e.g. when—on the bank of a river in Russia—he stepped onto a knife-blade. This episode serves as the basis for one of his finest pieces, "Have You Ever Felt It?", which is faultlessly Art Nouveau. (Kántor uses the style of *fin de siècle* chansons just as often as the tone of the blues.) A sense of brittleness acts as a fertile counterpart to the other dominant feature, an almost adolescent longing for justice.

Kántor's dissembling is more sincere than naturalness is with many others. He not only admits to the influence of popular genres but to that of modern classics as well. A list of the poets who have lent their styles to his volume would serve as a short history of literature. His favourite self-projective image is the barge and not the ship. He deliberately outwears his tricks (such as a poem broken off by three dashes) by their frequent use, and shows everything which one would not take to be spontaneous when coming from others, as having been concocted from the outset.

In a similar manner, he underlines his attraction to various cultures—their moods rather than such of their products as are held in high esteem. Thus Scandinavian, Dutch, English, and Middle Eastern features are included as well as, perhaps most substantially, Russian features. The Russian influence can be felt in his images, and even in his archaizing. (The illustrations are also Russian, by Vadim Brodsky.) It calls for some courage to subtitle the fine mourning poem, "Beyond the Cloud Barrier", as "Above Kiev". As a result of the discrepancy between the propaganda of success and Soviet reality, everything connected with the former empire has become linked with a singularly comic overtone. Kántor publishes translations from Russian more often than his own works. In these translations it is almost easier to recognize his typical manner than in his own poems, a manner which eschews all forms of boasting with individuality. (Some of his less successful translations are also interesting, as for example the way his resignation lacks the dignity of the original in his recently published versions of Mandelstam.) It is as difficult to catch him out in the lack of a personality as in the lack of sincerity. He points to his own empty points and flaws—and this finally gives him content and shows that he is no longer defenceless.

Although not directly stated, it is clearly a problem what an individual, never stylized as a hero, can do "On the Danube Embankment", where one would more easily understand "the listless indifference, that anything can be done / with us ... / anything until we somehow get lost, / and then everything starts again, the next day, / the river below, the canvases with birds above."

All that is left is the role of the outsider, to wonder sometimes ... "somewhat to the right of the winter, and somewhat with one's back to the spectacular summer" ("To the Muse"). He looks at other, better paid roles with profound mistrust. Contrary to what the title of the cycle, "Carried by the Street", would suggest, the basic tone of the lines that reflect on the revolutions in Eastern Europe is skeptical rather than enthusiastic. "The century is now bursting like a huge, diseased toy-balloon, / here under my very nose, and millions of panting Piglets / are running with the shrivelled, / mangy, clammy rags towards the century to come, / the new millennium..."

If his most striking characteristics are those of an adolescent in the best sense of the term, Kántor has reached back for his most unexpected effects to the points where both childish and primeval mentality coincide. The concreteness of lines such as "what are the little red fishes silent about in the coastal waters", simulate the common lore of ancient cultures. The magic metamorphosis recalling the *Kalevala*: "For nine days and nine nights / I was standing at the gate of death, calling you, / my legs fifty-kilo cement bags, / my arms impotent, dangling palings, / my voice a rapping woodpecker's". "At the Gate of Death"—is followed, in the way of a required effect, by lines which border on gushy sentimentality. Zoomorphic images are complemented by grotesque personifications. One of these gives voice to the most current of the attitudes to life it presents "Summer Is Over": A young lady once said on Erzsébet Bridge: / I longed for this and that. It happened. Now what is to be? / Well, what? Summer is over. / The barges keep sighing? Why? Why?"

The Transylvanian poet Zsófia Balla was born in the same year as Kántor, but she started her writing career which, for obvious historical reasons, cannot be called a smooth one, as a child. She had to re-compose *The Marks of the Armour* three times before the Hungarian publishing firm in Bucharest would (or, could) publish it. It took the Christmas revolution for her to be able to replace poems which had been removed by the censors. At the same time, hers has been an even development without any radical stylistic breaks. The features of her earliest works can be found in her latest ones too—and this does not only go for what is good in them. As a consequence, earlier minute dissatisfaction has grown into a serious objection. Zsófia Balla, too, turns to traditional means even daring to be more cantabile than Kántor. Although she lacks the same elegant solutions in construction and counterpoint, she still possesses an enchanting tone all of her own, the poetic voice that is not to be found even among her most eminent fellow poets.

The opening poem, "Rose, Rose", resembles a folksong and is about a flower which is not "just a rose" but is love. The similarly hackneyed metaphor of the shell regains its freshness in the perception of "Shell, Carapace, Armour", which is so easy to link with her life and her oeuvre. "The thought is hiding within armour, a pretty hard one. [...] The shell jaw clicks closed. / Salty tears roar between the teeth: the sea. / And the tongue, suffering, is bared from its shell." Tongue, in Hungarian as in English, can refer to the language, that Hungarian language so much put upon in Transylvania, making perfect mimicry on the part of its user impossible. Not that she would gladly shoulder the role of a spokesman of the minority; on the contrary, she protests against such a role as well as against other forms of predetermination, and in "Journeys" she deals with the superficial notions of visitors from beyond the frontier with scathing irony. "We change into an illustration. [...] We take our place in the townscape and I bleat / a poem in my

native tongue." In many of her poems can be glimpsed the most varied images of hiding and escape; some of them centre on the allegory of the armoured knight.

One cannot deny recognition of this renewed conventionality. It is more problematic when the poems move off the course set by tradition. This occurs quite frequently and, indeed, with such ease that sometimes it seems as if her poems were calibrated for only six to eight lines. In the rose-poem, too, there appears a line, "its stalk is thorn-wire", which (although part of the traditional rose allegory) does not fit into the single direction taken by a *Lied*. The singularity of her sense of form differs from the conscious rhyme-game of Kántor and many contemporaries: with Zsófia Balla, the rhymes appear at the end of some of the lines without any preparation. I feel tempted to misinterpret one of the lines in "The Life of the Knight": "I hardly see from my helmet". It is as if she has viewed her poems through a narrow gap and in the elaborating of details has lost sight of the composition as a whole. Her semantically divergent associations and unmusically sounding closing lines led one of her earlier critics to write that she can be lyrical only in her words and volume by volume, not poem by poem.

Nonetheless, Zsófia Balla has an all-embracing vision of the world, and the weaknesses cited do it surprisingly little damage.

It is the vision of *panta rei*, with dance being the operative word. For her everything is moving, and freedom is free movement itself. "Like the Waves of the Sea," a typical title, is telling. The soul is caught by a current, a strong emotion, on the dried-out floor of the primeval sea. ("The Sounds of a Shell"). Most of her poems use travel as their framework; if nothing else, at least the eye travels round the landscape, or fancy takes a voyage in time. Evil takes form in painful motion: "Enclosed in a role, you hobble well, / your legs are heavy, you scurry out of one door and in through another, out of one task into the face of another". Even immobility has mobility, as when she puts feather-quilted sleep into a romantic dream image: "under the wings of the wild-geese / we fly over the Moon lake, / raven-winged moons are moving about, hovering and flying on cool trees." ("Night Song, November"). The fragmentary character of this type of poem may have the effect of a jump-cut, but it also refers back to a hoary tradition: the "carnival culture" of M.M. Bakhtin, the Russian critic. This is the subject of "Ice Dance", subtitled "Carnival Ball", which mostly aims at acoustic effects and is practically untranslatable, and is to be found through all her work. The conjuring up of raptures long past and the emphasis on the festive moments of everyday life have a Baroque effect close to affectation, and not by accident. This is, at least in part, a consequence of her own self-interpretation. What in the Baroque centuries created the style of the period, has permitted her to develop an individual style. Even if the break in the impetus of the poems is not always intentional, the outcome recalls the convulsively pushing rhythms of the carnival. Even where she runs out of impetus, she is still able to transmit her adherence to it.

The contrast between emotional links and freedom is also resolved in dance, in regular movement. This also holds true for the relationship to God, a relationship which consists of a sense of want and desire rather than certainty. The tone springs from expectation, an expectation closely befitting the carnival motifs in the dark of winter, mostly in her pre-Easter poems, which after the revolution she moved over to the season of Advent.

The two older poets, László Baránszky and Sándor Rákos, are sharply marked off from the younger by certain features of modernism. Their set aim is a

looser form and they have not yet abandoned the desire for completeness. László Baránszky (born 1930) even seems somewhat dated when, to demonstrate the completeness of his approach, he spices his poems with scientific associations. The poet, an art historian who lives in New York, chose freedom, to use a favourite journalistic phrase, and not only by leaving Hungary in 1956, since his poetry is also dominated by neo-avantgarde features, and the influence of the Paris *Magyar Műhely* (Hungarian Workshop), the leading Hungarian periodical of this school. This group has to the present day preserved some typical features of the poetry of the 1960s, including some which have since lost their persuasiveness. Baránszky should, I think, abandon his desire to cram the monstrous collocation of "the complex steered by great general thermodynamic electromagnetic factors of uncertainty" (the cosmos) repeatedly into verse, and place less confidence in his devices: he should not follow some truly witty typographic tricks or bizarre quasi-etymological enjambments with dozens more that are arranged mechanically.

In spite of all this, the author of *En Route* is not an insignificant poet, and there is a real surprise still to come. The first cycle, "from a travel diary", primarily shows him as a cultivated man and, despite his flair for four-letter words, bashful. He discloses many of the signs of cultural decline: spoilt works of art, objects that turn out to be forgeries, corruption of the language, scientific superstitions, yet his intellectual modesty keeps him from affected seriousness and art-historian pedantry. His modesty makes him cautious in arriving at moral judgments, and leads him to expressing his sentiments indirectly. "Goddamn it that for so many years / I could not succeed in falling out of love with her [...] but this is meant for a life-time "NOW AT LAST I HAVE SPAT IT OUT THOUGH IT WAS FAR FROM EASY", he writes in "carmen," whose lay-out in the original is much more complicated.

It is all the more surprising when, contrary to "scientific" objectivity, he comes up with excessively personal details. He crams a great many intimacies into his recent poems. Mysterious first-names and nicknames briefly emerge but all in all they take up a much larger space than that due to references of a private nature. The subject of love lasting beyond the grave is varied with splendid ingenuity in "even if I turned into osiris," though this poem too ends with a memory of Florence that is unintelligible to an outsider. It is as if he wished to offer the relationship of an exhibitionist and a remorseful voyeur as a model for writing and reading.

What does the background to such obscure characters and situations, this diary-like self-chattering, intend to achieve? As an avantgarde poet, Baránszky might see it as a sign of a desire for spontaneity. More important still is the way in which he stresses his loneliness through it, his being lost in a welter of skin-deep relationships and incommunicable impressions: the rambles of the traveller "the cities of Europe are swimming in the depth below me" [...] the cities of Europe are shining like deep-sea animals", in "Amsterdam series 1.a." The real Baránszky is the isolated man with his portable solitude, which can be taken along even when in company. This is indivisible from looking facts in the face. And what these facts are, can be deduced from the lines speaking of arythmical breathing, of the "twin planets of light over the operating table", or a second heart attack.

Baránszky's best work is clearly "To Tibus Tullius, Bugler of the Second Legion of the Óbuda Castrum," in which he elevates intimacies into a hymn to perseverance. It should be given a place in future anthologies of Hungarian poetry. "the wind blows faster among the high-

rise prefabs [...] it sweeps now along the Pannonian hills where / more than one emperor and more than one army have stood their ground, / as do your successors here". The Roman stele, witness to countless Barbarian defiles, the fragmentary childhood memories of the poet and the environment, blend into an enchanting apotheosis that is entirely free of pathos. Óbuda, a part of modern Budapest along the Danube, was founded by the Romans; by the 18th century it had become a peaceful vine-growing village, later a weaving centre, and later still a location of institutionalized joviality, and now, most recently, a dormitory suburb of lunar barrenness. But none of these transformations have actually been completed. There remains a certain lingering mood, which somehow makes cosy the surviving paltrinesses of each period. The subject of the poet's memories from the 1950s is the most banal and ancient possible: the struggle for calories and for the warmth of human relations. Instead of the heroic features, he places emphasis on a serene persistence, which corresponds to the *genius loci* of Óbuda. Traces of this spirit can be discovered in his other works as well, the way in which "the junk of the world in my pocket", the "DEEP-FROZEN TELEVISION / VARIETY SHOWS the recently excavated / MILLION YEARS OLD SELF-SERVICE CABARETS", which fill his memories, become refined into something of worth. Paradoxically, Baránszky, an enviable cosmopolitan, is also an important local poet.

Of what remains, the best poem is "Kosztolányi's Sister II", which blends the expressionistic tradition of synchronous montage and the post-modern experience of the remote controlled TV with a Horatian tone, but the most typical piece of the cycle is "IV". The screen of the "word progressor" is the terminus of once threatening experiences, "Where my tormented handwriting disappears as does history in / the aseptic shelves of libraries". By way of counterpoint, he refers to the necessity for human solidarity, but his choice falls on sterile life. Evaluation of memories brings forth the tension of Eliot's "amalgamating disparate experiences". Sometimes he considers the deadly end-point as the very essence of the movement referred to in the collection's title; at other places all that counts are the colourful experiences gathered en route.

This latter attitude is evident in the striking slang Odyssey of "appendix". He avoids the variant of the myth that ends in death, and does not even follow Homer right to his destination, only as far as the protagonist's encounter with "nausica", accompanied with erotic allusions. The form is a dialogue of two neo-barbarians, a kind of a hasty résumé, in which the most disheartening features are not the lacunae in the learning of the characters but a ceaseless constraint for qualification (which in fact is more naive than the largeness of the epic). Poseidon keeps "always formenting", "Agamemnon" was really "done in" by his wife but, after all, "it was war he wanted", and so on. Even if it is no more than a joke, it is a joke on a senile culture—on a world which no longer offers any agreement, simply colourful experiences and a "nausica", a temporary home.

It is indeed easy to be attracted to this book, just as we were to our first atlas, our invitation to fantastic armchair voyages.

Sándor Rákos's (born 1921) fear of death is much more naked. He is predestined to elaborate only a few themes, though in minute detail, in a more logical order than that followed by any of the poets discussed here. Indeed, some of the poems in the various cycles converge. This time, however, it is more than that: unlike the pagan Baránszky, Rákos cannot find consolation in the phenomena of the outside world. His asceticism covers

an inner struggle: the struggle of the mind which at its very depth entertains faith, with an incredulous consciousness. His doubt is no ready-made cynicism but a hard-won standpoint, just as he shows esteem only for the kind of faith that is reached by human effort. (In "The Truth of Aton" he accepts Akhenaton as the ideal believer, though it is hazardous to interpret this differently from how we view the treatment by Ágnes Nemes Nagy in her great poem, so different in approach. ("From the Notebooks of Akhenaton," see *NHQ* 121.) The desire for perfection, that remains in Rákos, can no longer hope for anything to be given in this earthly world. "From now on I am going to live in a home / [...] / of an existence pared down to the very bone." He often plays the prophet inveigling against the idols of contemporaries, their play-acting and compromises (the cycle "Crooked Space, Crooked Time"). Even more frequently, he argues with the Lord: "if you are, why are you so hidden / that your existence should not be known / by the mortal, who can only surmise it in agony / [...] / and I do not think that I can be found / by your delayed grace in the stone-slide / of death, rumbling towards me" ("Blind Man's Buff"). These poems in the first half of the volume, plaintive and querulous, are the best. On behalf of his generation there is much to lament, a generation particularly hard hit by the vicissitudes of history: "everything has always failed to come off / [...] / our team, prisoners of eternal expectation, / have not learned to live, only to survive." ("Survivors") His great talent for effective formulations and his bent for abstraction prevail when he turns to a tragic subject.

The humour in the more satirical second part of "Bout" seems to be somewhat dry. He does find the appropriate expressions, but these do not have the concision of his earlier and more epigrammatic grotesques. His is a more unrestricted manner of expression than, for instance, Kántor's, and so it can not indicate detachment from what he has to say in the same way.

By the early 1960s, Rákos had developed a firm structure capable of closely following meaning. He does not leave everything to imagery and yet he wishes to avoid the lure of rhetoric. The solution came to him when translating Sumerian-Akkadian texts (his was the imposing translation of *Gilgamesh*); it also involves the rhythms of ideas and their haphazard fragmentariness, which encouraged him to boldly employ omissions. The topicality of the oldest written works that have come down to us has since occupied an important place in Rákos's thinking. He is fond of concepts such as eternal poverty, eternal fascism, etc. If these works have remained valid, time is not of such great significance. His latest volume, which even questions the sensibility of individual survival, is left with this one single hope. The last cycle, "On Rapture", adds apocryphal versions to Scripture. In the poems about the preparations for death, he often forcefully suggests that he is speaking from among the memories of the past, from below the ground as it were. He is the citizen of a "Silent Empire" (the cycle in remembrance of his late fellow poets), the inhabitant of "Sunken Cities"—he is a poet from Atlantis.

Béla G. Németh

The Might-have-beens of History

François Fejtő: *Rekviem egy hajdanvolt birodalomért* (Requiem for a Once Upon a Time Empire). Translated by Gabriella Jászay and Marianna Körmendy. Atlantisz and Minerva, 1990, 432 pp.

The author, of Hungarian birth, has lived in France for many years and this book was first published in French. A *succès d'estime* in France as well as in Hungary, Fejtő was awarded a high French distinction. François Fejtő was born in Zagreb in 1906, the son of Hungarian Jewish middle class parents. He was educated in Hungary and early in life took to writing and politics. At first he was a left Social Democrat, close to the Austro-Marxists; he soon found himself in opposition to orthodox communists loyal to the Soviet Union. In 1938 he was condemned to a prison term as a communist but succeeded in escaping to France.

In Budapest, in addition to his journalism, Fejtő also wrote criticism and essays. He was closely associated with the great poet Attila József and his journal *Szép Szó*. Although József, who committed suicide in 1937, had considered himself a Marxist and communist in his middle period, towards the end of his life he tended to recognize the affinity between Soviet socialism and fascist totalitarianism. József combined socialist ideals with the rights to freedom of the individual, making use of Freudian psychology and anthropology for the purpose; in his poetry, however, he approached certain basic elements of existentialist philosophy (time, death, loss of self, sin, etc.).

In time, Fejtő grew ever more critical of the views of his youth though he still called himself a socialist. In Hungarian terms, he could be called a social liberal or a liberal socialist. He is a writer on public matters, who displays an independent mind, marked social sensitivity, and a sound knowledge of history. It could well be that those brought up on textbooks written to political directives and by teachers who inflated slogans into the appearance of thought, will describe him as a conservative. Essentially all he does is to be wary of ideologies that promise redemption, and of attitudes that raise inherited superstitions and hysterias to the status of a progressive tradition.

Fejtő was naturalized in France and wrote a great deal in French. As an authority on the countries under Soviet occupation, he was often consulted by the government. In France he wrote books as well as journalism and, with an increasing frequency, books on history. His *Un Habsbourg revolutionaire* (Plon, Paris, 1953) on the Emperor Joseph II, is perhaps his best known work.

After he went into exile, the fate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its intellectual heritage increasingly took his at-

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tention, and the present book, as it were, sets the seal on this interest. It is a pity that the text has been abridged, only brief summaries of about a sixth of the original being provided in the Hungarian edition. And yet the texts which appear in Hungarian only in this form would have made useful reading for all brought up in the anti-Habsburg spirit which, in various guises, has dominated the teaching of history in Hungary for such a long time, not to mention for those others who, following indoctrination by György Lukács, think of themselves as an élite.

The aim of the close on 500 pages is to demonstrate that breaking up the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a Danubian state that united so many small nations, was a total mistake. What happened was the consequence of mistaken notions that paid no heed to the truths of history or of the time, the consequence of instinctive passions, temporary fashions and a serious lack of information, of individual ambitions and irresponsible promises, the consequence of cultivated phobias and ambitions on the part of the Great Powers, and not of what is called historical necessity or of a meaningful and useful rationality. Not that the vanquished, including those who ruled Austria and Hungary, failed to make their own contribution to the fatal decisions.

It would have been easier, Fejtő argues, more logical and natural, to transform the Habsburg Empire into a federation or confederation than to create a viable concert of nations out of what replaced it. Such a transformation might have allowed a balance to survive in East Central Europe, which would have suitably curbed both the German and Russian Great Power impulses to hegemony. Small successor states, however, that could be played off against each other, acted as a bait, which only stimulated the appetite of both.

But is there a *might have been* in history? An historian may work with fictions, using them to demonstrate why what happened happened, and why it happened the way it did. What Fejtő aims to show, and he largely succeeds, is that a) there were quite a number at the head of the Empire, with Charles, the young Emperor/King at their fore, who indeed wished to leave the German alliance, b) that breaking up the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not originally the intention of the majority of the leaders of the Allies, certainly not of the more sober-minded amongst them, even the more radical only seeking a moderate amputation, c) that the bulk of those living in the Empire neither thought of, nor desired, breaking away from it—the only people who did were some of their leaders, chiefly exiles, blinded by ideology and the hysteria of power.

Fejtő aims to be completely objective. He does not accept either the self-justification of the victors, nor the mea culpas of German historians. Political and economic relations within Europe, along with the dominant political frame of mind, made war inevitable in his opinion. The identity of whoever lit the fuse was a matter of chance. The race for primacy between Britain and Germany was at the centre of the conflict. To this was added the French desire for *revanche* and anxieties over Great Power status, as well as those frequently rehearsed Russian procedures for reducing tensions at home, by conquering new territories and posing as the defender of both the smaller Slav nations and of the balance of power in Europe.

The armies were rearing to go, and industry and the politicians, closely intertwined with the military everywhere, wanted to make sure of the advantages that taking the initiative would bring. The *soldateska* of the Habsburg Empire reckoned that the conflict could be largely localised to a clash with Russia in the Balkans, and used this argument to gain the support of Francis Joseph who, in his eighties, was barely able to keep up with events. According to Fejtő, the young Emperor/King urged three causes with

all his heart right from the moment of his succession: a separate peace that would offer an honourable exit from the German alliance, a federalist restructuring of the Empire, and universal suffrage.

The greatest error of the Hungarian political leadership, according to Fejtő, was that, being irrevocably opposed to the latter two of these, even the individuals who had originally opposed going to war, finally committed themselves to the German alliance. And yet if Allied politicians who symphathized with the continuance of the Habsburg Empire, such as Aristide Briand, or Lloyd George and especially Woodrow Wilson, could have been persuaded that these two of Emperor Charles' goals had prospects of success, there would have been no ultimate victory for the arguments of confirmed enemies of the Hungarians, or the lies and slanders of anti-Habsburg propaganda, chiefly emanating from Masaryk and Benes. Furthermore, credit and support would have been lent to Charles' continuing efforts to disengage from the war. It was of course not only the Hungarian leadership but also the General Staff, an important section of the court camarilla, primarily Count Czernin, the Foreign Minister, who crossed and indeed rejected these efforts. A particularly cruel example of this was the way in which Czernin forced the young monarch to deny all knowledge of the peace mission of his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma.

Fejtő repeatedly returns to the paradoxical situation that Germany, the major enemy of the Allies, suffered comparatively minor losses, but the Austro-Hungarian Empire was completely carved up. It is here that Fejtő's approach is worthy of consideration. In his view, France and her small Danubian allies were the motor of this carving up, the Danubian allies being driven by savage national interests. For it was precisely the opposite that was in the French interest and, according to Fejtő, the realists such as Briand, were well aware of this.

But the thinking of the average French intellectual was suffused with the rhetoric of the republican and enlightenment, atheist and free-mason, national and imperial heritage. They looked on themselves as the trustees of all these and similar ideals—and thus as the true guardians and missionaries of liberalism. This mission is their national and historical pride, right and duty. The essential counter-pole and chief obstacle to all this was the hierarchical monarchy of the Catholic Habsburgs.

According to Fejtő this was, almost in its entirety, shoddy, self-delusion, an ideological rhetoric that substituted for thought. They had no knowledge whatever of the situation in Central Europe, its history or the options open to it, nor that in the course of four hundred years, during and after the Turkish wars, a commonwealth of nations had here taken shape, in spite of accompanying frictions, of similar ways of thinking and mode of life, relying on each other and depending on each other. They, jointly and relatively quickly, overcame the destruction of the Turkish wars and the wars of religion, and then, in the 19th century made unprecedented progress in their economies and culture, ways of life and legislation. The rate of development was much faster not only than that of the southern states of the West, but also than in some of the French provinces. The Habsburgs, according to Fejtő, stood above the nations, not only acting as a brake on awakening savage nationalisms but, as it were, emotionally and intellectually prepared the Empire for a post-nationalist federalism. *Homo habsburgiensis* was born, ever disputing with his fellows, yet getting on together, helping and inspiring each other in competition, ever ready to show initiative.

When it comes to forms of government, Fejtő has no prejudices. According to him the Swedish, British or Dutch monarchies are as democratic as any republic. Benes and company showed a

sound awareness of the perfect ignorance of the majority of the French political class, trapped in a rhetoric they had not thought through thoroughly, and in a jealously guarded consciousness of their European mission. They played on this when they presented the Habsburg Empire as the sworn enemy of liberalism, artfully bribing the French press with money provided by the Czar.

Fejtő rejects and despises an attitude that preaches ideals without examining their timeliness and feasibility in the context of thorough local knowledge and a given reality. Adjustment to a situation and a readiness for compromise are essential aspects of policy. Let me quote one of many similar sentences: Briand's "foreign policy was in harmony with his domestic policy. A peace based on compromise, if this could save the lives of around a hundred thousand men, appeared more desirable than the victory of republican and anticlerical ideals." (p.212)

According to Fejtő, true liberalism is only possible where a readiness for compromise, an awareness of its need, is present in both parties. Intellectuals with no knowledge or understanding of history imagine that public morality consists of a demand for a radical idealism, and not in the rational pragmatism of constant amelioration. A liberalism based on compromise was, he argues, ever present in the Habsburg Empire, though not in the form of eternal declarations.

As I have mentioned, Fejtő interprets the outbreak of the war as the inevitable consequence of the political and economic situation.The numerous might have beens, connected with efforts to conclude a separate peace, somewhat contradict this (Hegelian) determinism. If the outbreak of war is a consequence of the situation, then surely so too is the failure to conclude a separate peace. Presumably he is aware of this, and his melancholy flows from possibilities that were not, and could not be fulfilled. To some degree he escapes from the horns of the dilemma by stressing the role of the individual, in a number of acutely observed, well-drawn sketches. He shows most sympathy for the young Emperor/King—though he reproaches him for the weakness he showed in attempting to realize his sound recognitions—and for Briand, whom he presumes to have escaped the empty rhetoric and the hatred and prejudice rooted in it. Lloyd George and Wilson, and Poincaré to some extent, are also treated sympathetically. Fejtő thinks that problems at home did not allow them to resist the aggressiveness of the French and Italians or of people like Benes. The latter not only managed to ensure compliance with promises irresponsibly given to them, but that they received even more than had been promised in the first place.

Fejtő's book, like all those dealing with historical problems, must be read critically. Yet there is no denying that he asks basic questions boldly, and in a fresh way, using new data, and placing them in a new light. This goes not only for war and peace, but for the whole of post-Mohács Central Europe. In any event, politicians and scholars alike should take the warning to heart that—whenever they speak out—they should bear in mind the sensitivities of others, in other countries, and especially in those that are neighbours. Speaking one's mind may secure one a public at home, but lose one's sympathy abroad. To give only the mildest of examples: if we keep on stressing how far ahead of our fellow Central Europeans we Hungarians are in this or that, our neighbours may well react with irritated annoyance and a certain antipathy may emerge in the West—at best forgiving amusement. To give one's country a bad name abroad is a crime, but boasting at home is an equally damaging mistake. This book is a cautionary tale, warning against the *fata morgana* of imagining that peace and security in the world can be created on our own, without the help of our neighbours.

Tamás Koltai

Past and Present Imperfect

István Örkény: *Pisti a vérzivatarban* (Pisti in the Bloodbath); Mihály Kornis: *Hallelujah*; Levente Szörényi and János Bródy: *Kőműves Kelemen* (Kelemen the Stonemason)

In the '70s and '80s a few Hungarian plays attempted to sum up the historical present. "Present" calls for no explanation, "historical" here refers to many elements of everyday reality that are rooted in the past. Why we live the way we do cannot be understood unless the road that has led to the present can be seen. These plays tried to seek out the neuralgic points of society; since until 1989 certain questions could not be discussed openly, much use was made with figurative language, parables, models. All the same, these plays often had a hard time in reaching the stage and even afterwards. Now some of them have been revived, and audiences have been able to judge whether they have maintained their validity in a changing world and seen in a different light.

Pisti a vérzivatarban (Pisti in the Bloodbath) had been completed in the early 1970s but could only be staged in 1979. István Örkény tried a new dramatic technique based on his own absurd "one-minute stories". The play has neither a consistent plot nor even a protagonist in the traditional sense, unless one considers Pisti—short for István (Stephen)—as the hero. Although when the play opens, Pisti seems to be a perfectly average youngster, it soon turns out that he is not only a person but an object too, and also the end and the means, an idea and a unit of measurement. While they speak of him, Pisti exists only as a void, a vacuum. The explanation is simple: "Pisti" is a Hungarian phenomenon, the product of 20th century (or perhaps even earlier) history. Pisti's development begins normally, until it turns out that "there are two of him": one pro-German, the other pro-Russian. Depending on who is to win the Second World War. In other words, Pisti develops schizophrenia in order to survive the "bloodbath". As a member of a firing squad, he goes over at the last minute to join the victims: antifascists, Jews and partisans. After the war he rises from the dead; his star is in the ascendant, but success turns his head, he becomes a paragon, an ideology floating so high over the heads of people that they do not even see it. This idea-Pisti does not even exist but his existence is justified by the fact that he must be glorified. This idea-Pisti's victim, the same Pisti again, is repeatedly executed in the early 'fifties and then after 1956; yet he always comes back to life, because he is a kind of "Hungarian James Bond", ultimately imperishable. He never feels really well; he is always un-

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ruly, as he dislikes monotony; he has several wives, is a constant fondler of women on the tram, paints hammers and sickles when this is just out of season; he conforms to every change, yet the only desire he has in life is not to be compelled always to be somebody else and to have to find stratagems in order to survive—just to be a plain ordinary Pisti, of whom the telephone directory says only, "a happy man".

Pisti is no less than an alternative to action, appearing in human form. His acts cannot be judged as the choices, decisions and metamorphoses of a given person, only as the possibility of these choices, decisions and metamorphoses in every single man. As Örkény puts it, the human quality "is not some indivisible and homogeneous 'good' or 'evil' phenomenon but the dramatic battlefield of different, indeed, hostile, forces." So symbol-Pisti embodies the battlefield itself. He is a human model functioning as a result of an inner struggle, not a flesh and blood man who at an appropriate time can be exchanged for another, for example the hangman for the victim.

If those who made cultural policy in the 1970s had understood the essence of Örkény's play, they would have found no fault with Pisti the pro-German and Pisti the pro-Russian being one and the same person, with Pisti being shot in the nape of the neck on the orders of Pisti, nor with Pisti being hanged in the name of the Pisti ideology. All that was the speciality of the age, which, according to the epigraph of the play, was "our begetter and killer, / so that we can be heroes and murderers / at the same time, in the same place and in one person. /Depending on the direction one is to take." A revival in the Madách Theatre even makes it clear that the Hungary of the past decades not only produced murderers and victims continuously, with exchanges of historical roles, but sometimes the murderers of the murderers and the victims of the victims as well. The proper expression is not to say that the play is more valid now than ever before. What is more valid is the standpoint from which the play reviews the vicissitudes of Pisti, always compelled to play-act, and his attempt to free himself of the Pisti roles so that he could become a simple and straightforward Pisti without any qualifying adjectives.

The production is moved by the recognition that the relevant moment, which had been longed for by Örkény but which he did not live to see, has now arrived — at least as a theoretical possibility. Pál Mácsai's production does not spare national symbols: he starts following "Pisti" from the time of the first Hungarian king (a Stephen) up to the Budapest Heroes' Square, redolently symbolic, and the broad avenue that leads to it which has changed its names so often (Andrássy út, Sztálin út, Népköztársaság útja—People's Republic Avenue—and now Andrássy út again). Pisti Street in the production changes names to follow the historical detours and turns of the century. The characters don the paraphernalia of the various periods and throw them away, with the various symbols piled one upon the other as junk. With no additions to Örkény's original text, the director brings the plot right up to the present day. Örkény could not foresee free elections; the production already shows that the suffrage in itself does not offer Pisti an unambiguous alternative. The play still has not come to an end; even after this latest episode in the series called "History", the caption "To be continued" can still be appended.

Mihály Kornis's *Hallelujah,* his first play, was premiered by the National in 1981, two years after Örkény's play. (Örkény was one of the influences on the younger playwright.) What stimulated him in Örkény was above all the grotesque, something typical of Örkény. Furthermore, *Hallelujah* likewise surveys

the historical possibilities of the protagonist at a given, "timeless" moment, just as *Pisti* does. "What year is it now? ... What is the date?" asks the nonagenarian Miksa Lebovics at one point. This grandfather spends most of his time in a huge brass bed between quilts and pillows piled up high. His grandson, Ernő Lebovics, in his thirties but wearing a school uniform and carrying a satchel, is uncertain in his answer: '55... No, '59!... '65! What do I know... I don't know, we aren't learning such complicated things." The Father turns up at the end of the play with objects typical of the 1960s and '70s, cheap Western goods that were then so hard to come by. (Where he has been, why, for how long, and the circumstances of his leaving, are never made clear.)

The time frame of the plot is simply a moment carved out of the present, but it holds all that we carry within ourselves of the past. The place is equally capacious. A small room dominated by Miksa's bed, in the course of the play it proves to be of surprising plasticity, turning into an office and a doctor's waiting-room, the location of a tenants' meeting and a marriage bureau, and, on one occasion, a train compartment jampacked with commuting workers.

Kornis projects a chronology into a "still", an unmovable situation, just as Örkény does in *Pisti*. *Hallelujah* is also somewhat reminiscent of Rózewicz's *File,* which too has a bed put on stage or, rather, in the street, with decades of Polish history milling through it. Kornis, however, makes extremely original use of his dramaturgical models. He does not develop the story along a chronological narrative but relates it in leaps and bounds, in a montage. The plot is based on the permanent "situation" of Miksa, Ernő and the absent father. This situation is then entered by the various characters, who usually come from Ernő's world. All of them are clichés, representatives of typical attitudes, and they present a cliché world. The play is constructed out of prefabricated elements, as it were. At every turn one encounters words (political rallying slogans), syntax adages, ditties, rhymed tags and verses whose origin and validity can be established to within 5 to 10 years. This perishable verbal stock, sensitively handled by Kornis, puts over a situation which defines Ernő historically and socially.

For Ernő is the real protagonist. While the others, even Miksa, are background characters to lend an environment for Ernő's agonies, Ernő is not only a more complex character. He even exists in a different dimension: the child and the man are telescoped or, like the full-face and profile in a Cubist painting, appear simultaneously. The result is a precocious teenager permanently preparing for life, compelled to do his homework but never doing it, who ought to have done his duty to society long ago, but still manages his private and public affairs with overdone infantilism and compromising aggression. *Hallelujah* is just about this. At least on the surface.

A deeper layer reveals a social absurdity. The post-war generation has been "retarded" because they were excluded from the management of affairs, Kornis's play tells us. After the sclerotic Grandfather, living in nostalgia for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Father, smoothing out the lies inherent in the ideologies with a mercantile view of life, the generation of the Sons, lacking true ideas, faith and obligations, necessarily remained infantile. This self-ironic angry and derisive approach made *Hallelujah* undesirable in the eyes of the authorities. When drama critics judged it to be the best Hungarian play of the 1981 season, the man who controlled cultural activities did not allow this to be made public nor the attached prize to be handed over. And he had the play withdrawn.

What János Vincze, who directed the revival, had to fight was not censorship,

but the time that has passed since the first performance. The production, at the Third Theatre in Pécs, registers the fact that the generation in question has not been able to "grow up" since either. There are some things that have changed; for instance, cheap goods from the West no longer count as a novelty, but the sense of being late, of becoming infantile, the "deprivation disease" arising from the lack of any social role, have remained valid. This grotesque play warns that the wasted years, the phase lag, the missed opportunities, cannot be made up for overnight.

The popular Hungarian folk ballad *Kőműves Kelemen* (Kelemen the Mason) has been used by several writers and poets. The concise original ballad is an attractive model: it is about Déva Castle in Transylvania, which twelve masons are unable to complete, as the walls keep collapsing. "What they raised in the morning, collapsed by the evening, what they raised in the evening, collapsed by the morning". The place is under a curse, which can only be lifted by a sacrifice. They agree among themselves that the wife who first comes to them will be immured. Kelemen's wife is the first to arrive. They sacrifice her, mix her ashes in the lime and build the castle.

A rock opera, *Kőműves Kelemen,* by composer Levente Szörényi and librettist János Bródy, was first performed in 1982, and it remained faithful to the moral of the original ballad: a wall that is raised at the cost of human sacrifices is accursed. The production closes with the original folk ballad, a fine dramatic touch, in that the story as seen on stage is in fact a curtain raiser for this concisely formulated summary. This is a kind of Brechtian dramatic structure, since the story of Kőműves Kelemen is known to everyone in Hungary, and the play itself simply relates the course of events leading up to the dénouement. Imre Sarkadi's fragmentary play, *Kőműves Kelemen* (which had several versions) stood in good stead for this conception, as Sarkadi, too, saw a model in the basic story. To the folk tradition of human sacrifice, he added the motif which faintly appears in the original as well, namely that the sacrifice is called for to stimulate the flagging faith of the builders. Thus the story is moved by the ideology that holds that it is only possible to build at the cost of sacrifice.

Csaba Iványka, who has adapted Sarkadi's dramatic torso for the musical stage, jointly with the composer and the librettist, has obviously aimed at preserving both main motifs: the mysticism of the original ballad and the 20th century mind set based on it. All this, of course, with the perfunctoriness of a musical, since even a rock opera can hardly convey subtle shades. This is mainly evident in the inability to grasp the mental processes of Kelemen the protagonist. The drama of a man who is nurtured by faith and who nurtures faith in others, is lost somehow. The man who accepts the unacceptable (the necessity of human sacrifice) in order to build up the Work—or, as he puts it, the Future, and then is made by his own tragedy to realize that the Future is man himself. If he destroys man, he destroys the Work.

However, the ensemble character of the genre does involve an advantage in the portrayal of how the collective consciousness fluctuates. The twelve masons produce a representative model of the mass by which one can assess the functioning of mass psychosis. One of the great merits of the production of ten years ago was that it could treat this chorus both as a group and as individuals as well, almost on the model of a Greek chorus. Passing through the phases of sudden fervour and disenchantment, of seeking a scapegoat and shifting responsibility, they finally arrive (and this is an addition to the source) at the remorse-awakening moment when they are being absolved of the charge of collective mur-

der, during the festivities to mark the completion of the wall. The acquittal is interrupted by the unmerciful curse of the original ballad.

The sparklingly hard music virtually stipulates a sweeping choreography. Ferenc Novák was the choreographer of the production of ten years ago as well: he used a spectacular fabric of masculine gestures, body-to-body grapplings, rooted in the Rumanian *kolinda* and in folk dance. Physique, sweat, the steaming of the bodies, gasps, all had their aesthetic role in the dance. Now, in the larger space of the National Theatre, the emotions expressed through movement have become even more impetuous, the mass psychosis emerging in the group even wilder, more merciless, and thus more expressive. Novák knows a great deal about Hungarian overconfidence, its noble expansive force and ignoble distortions and, like every good artist, looks at it with both recognition and criticism. The metaphor of the Work completed at the price of human sacrifice had a sharper transference ten years ago than it does today, but fortunately, this is not a play with no more than a timely political message. Since even today there are those according to whom one has to build, not with bricks and mortar but with faith, a faith which is generated by sacrifices, *Kőműves Kelemen* has retained its validity.

This time Novák also directs the play, and he has strengthened the motif that the idea of human sacrifice comes not from Kelemen but from his mate, Boldizsár, and by placing them one behind the other, he presents them as the two selves of a single man. This is useful, provided it does not serve to minimize the guilt of Kelemen, whose faith had been perverted. All forms of faith are questionable which are fanatical, unconditional, allowing for no doubts, which are compatible with the sacrifice of innocent people. Kelemen, trying to come to terms with his act, is no tragic hero, and he is even less of one when he justifies his personal loss by the completion of Déva Castle. The curse heard at the end of the play has maintained its validity. With a consistent gesture, Novák drops the "Work", made of shining steel tubes, to fence in the masons as a prison.

We cannot escape from the past, collective crimes have poisoned us and we carry them with us. There is no sense in looking for the culprits—we are all more or less guilty.

Edna Rauth

Hungarian Film Week 1992

After a year's break, the 23rd Hungarian Film Week was held this February within a five day, triple venue unfestival like format, in which over 120 films were sandwiched into a frenetic timetable, ensuring only that none of the documentaries and about ten features would ultimately be missing in this reviewer's recollections of two years' work.

Only two or three films concerned themselves ostensibly with the past, intent on revealing hitherto obscured or suppressed truths, such as Sándor Sára's sensitive portrayal of five soldier deserters during the Second World War, György Molnár's town circus during the brief proletarian dictatorship in 1919, and Márta Mészáros's third and final stab at revealing the brutal consequences of the 1956 uprising. Most of the films were set in the present day, which inevitably meanders between 1989 and slightly before and after.

Prize-giving was deemed unnecessary, and public participation warmly welcomed by all organizing bodies proudly proclaiming that the days of the esoteric professional gatherings are gone, and that for 25 forints a ticket in downtown cinemas, the discerning Hungarian film fan (of which those involved in the newly commercial atmosphere of film-making fear there are far too few) could sample the current crop of films. This, of course, is quite right and proper, because ticket buyers are after all going to dictate tastes and demand, and thus have a bearing on financial budgeting for studios. That being the case, it will be interesting to see how many "commercially viable" projects will emerge in the next few years, now that profit margins are as important as winning prizes in trendy film festivals.

What exactly goes into making a Hungarian film potentially successful at the box-office, is a mystery to Hungarians and, indeed, all Europeans. Given that most European productions lack the kind of budgets that the big American studios invest with the safest ingredients, i. e. sex, violence, horror, star appeal, action adventure, cathartic story lines, neat plots, suspense and cute twists for endings, one need have no fear at present of too many popular failures, such as *The Dolls Are False,* directed by István Bujtor, and György Dobray's *Lover Hearts,* which must have cost over 20 times as much as the average Hungarian feature film made in 1991. Both directors are veterans in turning out such fare, hardly exposed to the all-percieving eye of the foreign audiences at the festival, but raking in substantially more cash than their contemporaries.

Julianus, by Gábor Koltai, was another film no one took much notice of, nestled into the programme mid-festival, early in the morning. Yet looking at the attendance figures for this film, it came second only

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to Kevin Costner's multi Oscar-award winning film, among those films in 1991 given financial support towards distribution by the State coffers, in *Julianus'* case by the recently established Motion Picture Foundation of Hungary. This overlong film aspires to epic proportions but falls far short of its noble intentions, to depict the lifelong quest of a 13th century Dominican friar who is believed to have discovered the descendants of the Hungarians who stayed in the East. Colourful trips to Italy, marauding Turks, parched deserts and dying travelling companions lend little credence to this moral tale of faith and determination, nor do the two-dimensional characterization and dreadful film score of folksy pop lyrics.

As many as twelve directorial debuts were on offer among the forty features. The themes were varied and provocative if not always original or genuinely inspired. Mercifully, the new directors preferred to reflect the changing look of society in Hungary incidental to the film, if at all, rather than make dangerously grand gestures or attempt to convey sharp moral, political or sociological messages, as their forebears since the war justifiably felt compelled to do. The look and mood of the film seemed to weigh significantly, and in many cases, such as Attila Janisch's *Shadow on the Snow,* Zoltán Kamondi's *Paths of Death and Angels,* András Salamon's *Je t'aime,* and Can Togay's *Summer Residence,* managed to do this quite successfully. The sets, location, casting, acting, and photography were in most cases engaging enough to the eye to sustain one's interest over ninety odd minutes, even if the story line floundered or disappeared entirely into a patchy and pretentious collage posing as art cinema.

Many of the established names, not surprisingly, turned their attention to themes of the present day, using film as a vehicle for personal introspection during the recent upheaval in their political and social lives, with little regard for developing a story line, let alone for creating powerful cinema. Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács, for example, had the central character wallowing in selfpity against a beautiful backdrop of an autumnal Lake Balaton in *And After All.* Kristóf Zeyk, alias András Kozák, giving a characteristically leaden performance, plays a journalist in his fifties who is numbed into silence after being labelled a Stalinist in an acrimonious rebuke typical of many a political argument in Eastern Europe in 1989. He escapes to the solace and beauty of Balaton, to examine past actions and their effect on the present. The film sets out to evaluate a generation waking to the consequences, both personal and political, of professional guilt and compromise in the past. The overall effect is more like chunks of an autobiography, lyricized into celluloid. The feeling of morose introspection and suspension from time is well balanced against the unravelling events in other parts of Eastern Europe in the latter part of 1989. These are shown through television clips, in this and other films, and suggest that, though bystanders in the truly dramatic and historic events unfurling in neighbouring countries, the Hungarians are no less influenced by the aftermath of the fall of the communist regime.

Ferenc András's *The Last Summer,* with an equally pleasant summery country setting, courses leisurely through a few days in the life of another resentful intellectual approaching a mid-life crisis, and, as if that wasn't bad enough, the year is 1989. Still young enough to be sexy—easy enough role for György Cserhalmi—one time radical-thinking man, wishing he still was, now comfortably off, childless, yearns for the love of his friend's daughter. Unaware of the passions involved, the girl's boyfriend—tomorrow's intellectual?—extols the virtues of his wise hero, inevitably to be disappointed in the final denouement. This is a sorry scene during and after a forty somethings' party that turns into a minor

catastrophe of drunkenness and unleashed frustrations. What kind of example does this generation set for its sons and daughters? How does one account for the compromises, the ideals, lost dreams and disillusionments? This is not András' first foray into the lives and minds of his own generation—one has to think only of his *The Great Generation* in 1986. The subject is an interesting one, and the phenomenon is no doubt one that is being addressed by sociologists as well as film directors trying to find expression in their own art, but the fact is that *The Last Summer* never really takes off as a film. Its only success is in creating a numb and transitory mood in surroundings broken from the cut and thrust of everyday life, even though the personal strains between the main characters are bubbling under the surface. If András had concentrated more on enlivening the plot with the complex interactions of his able cast, one might not have been left at the end with the feeling that one's sympathy does not really lie with this section of society but with the other 95 per cent of the population, and that everything will come out in the wash anyway, next summer or the one after, if one only believes it will.

Miklós Jancsó's two offerings in the last two years show that he is obviously beyond the mid-life crisis but never keener to stand apart from the Establishment, whatever its shade of political ideology. His main inspiration seems to be in imposing "what if" questions on the political chaos he invents (or takes from real life) amid an orgy of Jancsó stage props. In 1990's *God Walks Backwards,* he presents a thesis on the fear of the Soviets returning, topical enough at the time for what he terms pseudo history. In *Blue Danube* (1991), the focus is on the assassination of a political leader in a banana style republic, a demonstration of vested interests outweighing democratic mandates.

In the former, the Jancsó trademarks are exhibited throughout with the zeal of a reckless teenager fearless of the dangers of repetition turning to banality. Alas, he is down to a single naked girl but is determined to make good use of her throughout, flaunting her as a French girl, and thereby a symbol of purity and liberty (if not equality and fraternity), to be tossed around from lounging artist with a pony-tail to director to money-grabbing opportunist to communist to democrat to sidekick. The analogies are all crammed in and painfully obvious, even before the tanks come rolling in and the guns blast everyone away.

Jancsó must have been warned that so much nakedness, considered so beautiful when tastefully shot in the sixties and seventies, may not endear him so much to today's audiences. *Blue Danube* is a milestone in his professional career in this respect, because he has decided to employ, among the familiar crowd of sinning and sinned against faces, the high calibre and established actresses Dorottya Udvaros and Erzsébet Kútvölgyi, who are much too dignified to undress for the cameras at this stage in their career.

Jancsó's new cinematic weapon, the gun, if you'll forgive the pun, cause of a chain of deaths in both films, is followed by the roving eyes of the ubiquitous TV sets in endless dizzy takes, allowing us to eavesdrop on private conversations and stealthy actions. A cross of Machiavellean intrigue and political spoof requires a sense of humour but the old master may be taking himself too seriously, and the effect is lost on all but our eyes, thanks to János Kende's fluid photography.

Jancsó's veteran contemporaries, Sándor Sára, Márta Mészáros and István Szabó, told more straightforward stories, as indeed one would expect, and the fruits of their labour show maturity, directorial confidence and skill, as well as a deep-felt conviction in examining the social and personal strains felt during times of

political upheaval and anxiety. There was also noticeably more urgency in their films, if not in the pace of the stories themselves. No time indeed to submerge the screen in introspective characters walking round in circles through a ponderous narrative, around villas, country cottages, lanes and roads, leaving cinematic inspiration at the pedestrian crossing.

Sára's *Ruthless Times* is set at the end of the Second World War when the Germans, still entrenched in Hungary, are making a last attempt to stop the approaching Soviet Army. A Hungarian sergeant and four privates take advantage of a stamp they can forge open orders with, desert and play a tense waiting game, lying low in the country. The film is not about allegiance to the winning side but a desperate attempt at survival against the odds—a futile death as a pawn on the front lines. The villagers help even amidst a cloud of suspicion, but a shrewd local judge, sensing the truth, orders them, in a poignant ironic twist, to check the area for deserters. The outcome of this is as tragic as the arrival of the Soviets, who spare them no mercy either. One can almost sense the melancholy sigh of relief at finally being able to tell the truth about this part of Hungarian history. Filmed in black and white to lend an air of the period, acted flawlessly by five relatively unknown actors to lend further credibility to the story, and a marvellous drunken scene played by Péter Andorai as the judge, this film deserves a place among any list of best war films. Sára claims *Ruthless Times* is not about war, yet it is a fine and moving study of the effects of war on two levels: on those who are forced to fight a war in which their homeland is a battlefield for two opposing mighty powers, and on a universal scale where survival is questioned with heroism—*Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori*—examined, as it were, on ground level.

Márta Mészáros' *Diary for my Father and Mother* is also a film with a sharp message and sympathetic, though not sentimental outlook towards victims of the Soviet invasion of Hungary after the 1956 uprising. It is a neat end to the *Diary* trilogy, with a pacy script-unlike the two earlier films—pulling together all the strands and destinies fitting to its various clearly etched characters. There is clever use of documentary footage, often with the action or character interweaved or mounted on the real or studio doc-reel. Juli, the young film graduate, comes home from studying in Moscow to witness the true extent of the horrors as the film unfolds. Jan Noviczki, playing Juli's father figure János, emerges as the true hero, the man of conviction, anger and bitter resignation as he faces the music on the day of judgement, and a prison sentence for participating in the strikes following the revolution. The climax of the whole film comes at the New Year's Eve party when all the family and friends are present, in an attempt to reconcile their differences, temporarily at least. The underlying mood is ominous and this is borne out as the film draws to a close. What seems to be incidental to, rather than a flaw of, the film is its portrayal of Juli and her unapparent burning desire to document all she sees. Taking into account the strong autobiographical aspect of the *Diary* films, Mészáros seems to have finally got caught up in, and given prominence to, unfurling historic events, but this she does confidently. The timing of the concluding part of the trilogy could certainly not have been more fortunate.

István Szabó, who made good with his Oscar winning *Mephisto* ten years ago, is still reaping the fruits of that success, despite the fact that each of his three subsequent films have been progressively worse, especially *Meeting Venus*. In this he assumes the didactic role of informing all aspiring "Europeans" how silly they are to constantly misunderstand each other, nurturing national indulgences in-

stead of striving for the task at hand, in this case, the rendering of a Wagner opera into a lavish production by a multinational cast. David Puttnam put his name to that project, and everyone expected fireworks and crackers to explode cinema consciousness in Europe. Not a bit of it. But his Sweet *Emma, Dear Böbe* has a very Hungarian or East European (or is that Middle European?) subject, and seems to work more admirably for it. Practise what you preach—as the saying goes. Both these grand pillars of European cinema have, in their time, and especially in home territory, been great panegyrics of national themes in movies. Their best films, produced or directed, were hinged on this philosophy. *Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe* is testimony to this, just as *Chariots of Fire* was.

There will always be things we do not understand in foreign films, for instance in verbal humour, which is invariably lost on an audience reliant on subtitling. But we're all human beings. We can all relate to the joys and sorrows of a good cinematic hero. Szabó can rest assured that a lot of informed spirits out there in the north, south, east and west are acutely aware of the fact that the number one lingo is English. It certainly wouldn't tire too many brain cells to understand the problems this holds for most former Russian Language teachers in a country like Hungary today, who have to keep up a tiring schedule of being one lesson ahead of their pupils in English.

Pity not young sweet Emma and dear Böbe, but the older teachers, and the headmaster, whose whole moral, political curriculum has been turned upside down, and is trying to keep his reputation and family intact, as well as sweet Emma, who has fallen madly for him, at heel. The mid-life crisis looms again. The headmaster is at an age where Emma is a grand prize, but ultimately it is a comfortable life he seeks. Not so sweet Emma, who accepts the changes, the hours of English, accepts her fear and embarrassment turning to anger when pestered by Gypsies, refuses to sell her body as dear Böbe, except under her own conditions with another teacher. One need not pity Emma, for though they come from the country and earn enough to share a rented room, she has youth and idealism on her side. Pity not Böbe, who roams the bars of central Budapest for affluent foreigners, is involved in drug dealing and in her shame commits suicide. That is just an ending Hungarians adhere to when they don't know how else to end a film. It may have been warranted if Szabó had spent more time depicting the downfall of Böbe, but most of what we glimpse is a gutsy, earthy survivor. The emphasis, however, is most certainly on Emma. The real poignancy of the film is in the Eric Rohmer-like anecdotal but interlinked passages, the everyday study of life for the girls. Take a few sensual but harmless scenes of them alone in a weekend county cabin, add a beautiful foreign face in the leading role (Johanna Ter Steege), a few wooden performances from otherwise fine actors, (notably Péter Andorai, acting as if he were addressing a theatre audience throughout), a clumsy love scene, and the main character in repressed social circumstances who retains her dignity and ideals in what is most important to her, i.e., love and not politics, and you have all the necessary ingredients for a classic post-war Hungarian, nay, European film. The lack of restraint in a Hollywood style treatment would ensure certain failure. I really enjoyed this film, not so much for the central story as the trimmings, those little home truths that help form a picture of a part of life in today's Hungary, showing how people cope with the bigger and smaller changes in themselves and what's around them. For this, it deserved the Silver Bear prize it took at the recent Berlin Film Festival.

Pál Erdős's film, *Homo Novus*, also deals with the trials and tribulations of a

teacher, this time in the crumbling Soviet Union. The all Russian cast is exemplary, not least Irina Kuptchenko, who is highly convincing as a near hysterical maths teacher finding it consistently harder to cope with her unruly teenage students. Anarchy in the classroom is palpably shown here as a microcosm of anarchy in the whole country. Antagonism between authority and the masses goes beyond limits acceptable in the classroom, and the sympathy is tilted towards the teachers, in the wake of the children's cruelty when kidnapping the "enemy's" small child. Even as a story of psychological manipulation, of someone so gripped by the fear of failure that they are unable to control a situation, the film makes compelling viewing, not only for teachers!

The juvenile delinquents in János Rózsa's *Brats* don't even bother going to school. An acceptable enough variety of youngsters has the audience giggling and sighing intermittently at their pranks and motivations. There is the Jack London fan with the micro-cassette recorder who, like his hero, is forever in pursuit of adventure, regardless of the consequences, the oddly charming hairy hippy, the weirdo with the psychotic touch, the dwarf hit man and the simple lass from Transylvania, who soon latches on to the mischief, although it is evident she knows better. The grown–ups are busy watching TV throughout, 1989 and all that, while the brats break into cars and toy shops. The recipe is similar to other Rózsa films, including the successful *Love, Mother* in 1987. Orphaned and neglected children lacking moral guidance and parental attention come to no good. The outcome is tragic of course, but the passion of telling the young peoples' story trickles out well before the final scenes are shot.

Halfway through the festival there was a great deal of hustle and bustle in the cinema hall prior to the screening of Vilmos Zsigmond's *The Long Shadow*. Haunted by now by a procession of jumbled-up slow and melancholy figures escaped from various films, I anticipated a little light relief from the Hungarian made good in Hollywood. Liv Ullmann and Michael York were responsible for the crowds that not even Károly Eperjes could summon to the Metro cinema during the entire length of the festival. On its predestined path to the TV screen, *The Long Shadow* entertained only with a pleasant backdrop of sunny Israeli locations. Stiff direction, wooden acting and an implausible and ultimately sentimental story-line fatally marred this coproduction and served only to accentuate the differences in movie-making styles.

Only Péters are capable of providing light relief, particularly if their surnames are Gothár, Gárdos or Tímár. There were plenty of ready-made laughs in *Melodrama* (Péter Gothár), *The Scorpio Eats up Geminis for Breakfast*—one need look no further than the title (Péter Gárdos), and *Slap Jack* (Péter Tímár). Tímár and Gothár show they have an increasingly engaging eye for the absurd, turning social satire into farce in a delicate balancing act right up until the last shot. Brilliantly shot and edited, generally well cast—note Károly Eperjes resembling himself more in every film, but deliciously funny as a figure of fun in *Slap Jack*— highly individual and eccentric, both directors represent hope in a self-diagnosed ailing film industry. The social and political parallels are always present. In *Slap Jack* there is the house and its alarm system and the anachronistic "workers'" militia commander next door, with his secret underground drill sessions. In *Melodrama,* the truth coming out after 20 years of a prison sentence, show up betrayal as cowardice between two old friends. Gárdos tells a tale of hopeless incompatibility in a passionate, slightly whacky love affair. He did his homework on *Scorpios,* because Enikő Eszenyi certainly leads her partner, Péter Rudolf, on a merry dance and controls each break-up and make-up scene

with ruthless unbending audacity. It is Mari Törőcsik and Dezső Garas who steal the best lines, though maybe their pure comic acting skills, or stars, forbid them to do otherwise.

János Xántus presents us with the quirky *film noir* antics one has come to expect from him in *Cruel Estate,* and makes less of a meal of the grotesque and decadent than some of the up and coming directors, but with much more effect. Zoltán Kamondi is one such culprit. It would be no surprise to anyone who recalls the avantgarde scene of Budapest in the 1980s, that *Paths of Death and Angels* was written in 1982. This is decadence gone wrong, chewed up and spat out in stark visual images, leaving the main characters whirling suspended in the barest threads of a plot where death—with a big D—is the underlying theme, and the father-son' and loved one's entagled hopes and wishes for each other are spun out in between orgies of hollow hipness. A hollow happening this is indeed, complete with symbolic crows, desolate settings, blind boys spooning out words of wisdom, the moody and good-looking hopeless hero, the elflike and sultry heroine. Relating the story would be merely peremptory. It is mood and feel that counts. If anyone recognizes the party goers at the Yucca Club, they will realize that Kamondi, intentionally or not, gives a picture reminiscent of the nihilistic yet luxuriant atmosphere of the peripheral arts scene of the 1980s. Soundtrack and selected footage would make a watchable pop video.

András Salamon's directing debut, *Je t'aime* also tends to favour the slick look, but at least shows traces of humour, most significantly in Andor Lukáts's fine performance as Laci, the wise-cracking, almost amiable wideboy, who exploits two country girls by convincing them a very comfortable living can be made working in peep shows in Vienna. The desparation and tackiness is visible, but fails to lend a mixture of bleak yet subtle perception and insight to the tale. All in all, Salamon demonstrates he has talent in his chosen field, as does his contemporary, Attila Janisch, whose *Shadow on the Snow* was distinguished, not least, by the fact that it was the first film shown at the festival. Full credits must surely go to cinematographer Tamás Sas, who is responsible for the look and feel of this black and white film, and Togay Can's *Summer Residence.* Janisch's story of sin is tightly controlled, full of tension, about a man of no particular character, quest or ambition, admirably performed by. Polish actor Miroslaw Baka, thrown by fate into the scene of a crime and ending up with the booty. His escape out of town to the "safety" of the country is memorable for the claustrophobic and fraught atmosphere created, despite the apparent freedom and solitary splendour of the landscape. Janisch has made a fine first feature, using the best tools of the trade within his budget, despite a slightly disappointing ending. Most endings are disappointing in films, so one mustn't blame him too harshly, even if a film of this genre demands a satisfactorily unnerving but neat conclusion.

I would have liked to draw on information and ideas gathered from the many talks and discussions on film-making in Hungary today, that took place during the 23rd Film Week. Among the begging bowls, the nattily dressed independent producers plugging their half-finished wares, the young and not so young—but still calling themselves young—filmmakers from various new associations and societies complaining of insufficient funds, the sympathetic French foreign guest reviewers, I remember mostly the odd voice of logic occasionally raising grunts of approval from weary, glass-eyed festival goers, artists, writers and filmmakers: "Why don't we just concentrate on making good films, instead of moaning about handouts, or deciding what a

producer is until nigh on midnight?"

The voice of logic has a point. One hears of the brink of disaster in serious film making—this isn't a nation of optimists, least of all among intellectuals—imminent studio closures, restructuring of studios into separate companies, doomsday foreboding of what's to come. Figures meant to throw light on financial procedures always add to the confused notion that money for the cinema has run out. I would contest this is simply not true, or any more desparate than the situation in Britain, for example, but it is really a subject for another article.

The main thing is that Hungarian cinema is alive if not kicking. Out of 25 films premiered this February, a good half dozen were worthy of wider audiences outside Hungary, in Eastern and Western Europe. Whether or not they reach many cinemas is, as usual, a matter of money, taste and, to a certain extent, geography—not art or talent.

Paul Griffiths

Desert Flowers: Kurtág's Recent Music

Two of the rare qualities of György Kurtág's music, its completeness and its immediacy, blast any attempt at verbal commentary into insignificance. There are no secrets here, no intricacies withheld. All that needs to be said, all that can be said, is being said by the music, whose every note, every chord, every brief phrase, every instrument, every vocal nuance, every connection registers with the authority and distinctness of something meant to be heard and meant to sound meant. If any words can be useful, they are the words the music has made into its own voice: words of intensity, clarity, sharp beauty and humour that Kurtág has found in Hungarian writers from Péter Bornemisza to János Pilinszky, in the Russian poet Rimma Dalos, and more recently in Kafka, Hölderlin and Beckett. His own unwillingness to speak or write about his music must give us pause. So too his story, recounted in his single published interview (with Bálint András Varga in *Három kérdés—nyolcvankét zeneszerző*, Budapest, 1986), that he was disappointed when he first heard Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, because it was not the piece he had been reading so much about.

The hope of this article must be to avoid evoking such spectral compositions from among Kurtág's work, to offer rather an introduction to what exists—something which may be necessary when his music is not widely available in print, when recordings have been few and ephemeral, and when the larger recent pieces have all been for unusual groupings of instruments and voices, militating against frequent performance. Another justification might be the fact that the map of Kurtág's output needs some adjustment after the events of the last few years.

Before that, during the three decades ending in 1987, his creative achievements were either painfully slow or else brief and fitful. In all that time he had reached only as far as op. 26 in his own careful catalogue, and most of his works were not only fragmentary in scale, lasting only a few minutes, but also tightly economical in resources. There were two compact collections of choral pieces, and two larger scores predating his op. 1: the Viola Concerto and the unpublished *Korean Cantata*. Otherwise his biggest ensembles were the dozen or so players required to accompany the solo soprano in the Four Capriccios op.9 and the *Messages of the Late Miss R.V. Troussova* op.17. The brevity and the paucity were, alike, the signatures of the effort and the desperation involved in Kurtág's struggle with silence, the silence that overcame him completely for several years before his op.1 (the String Quartet he wrote in 1959 at the age of thirty-three) and again in the early 1970s.

Beside this, his output since 1987 looks prolific. There have been four works for

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larger ensembles: *...quasi una fantasia...* op. 27 no.1 for piano and groups of instruments (1987-8), its companion piece with the bold title of *Op. 27 No.2* for piano and cello soloists, each with an attendant ensemble (1989-90), *Grabstein für Stephan* op. 15c for guitar and groups of instruments (1989), and *Samuel Beckett: What is the Word* op. 30b for voices and instruments in various groupings (1991). There has also been a substantial string quartet, *Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky* op.28 (1988-9), quite apart from a scattering of smaller pieces for piano, for tenor and piano, for organ, for cello, for quartet, and for less conventional outfits: cello, two violins and celesta in *Ligatura-Message to Frances-Marie* op. 31b (1989), two pianos and two basset horns in *Életút* op. 32 (1992).

One could suggest various reasons for this sudden blossoming. Kurtág's retirement from full-time teaching at the Budapest Academy of Music in 1986 would be one, perhaps another would be the confidence generated by the achievement and the reception of what is his longest work so far, the *Kafka-Fragmente* for soprano and violin, first performed in April 1987. Yet another might be the arrival of instrumentalists who, like the soprano Adrienne Csengery throughout the 1980s, could respond to his exacting demands: the pianist Zoltán Kocsis, the cellists Miklós Perényi and Frances-Marie Uitti, the violinist András Keller.

But then this last point is a reminder that the post-*Kafka* music, though ampler in scale and quantity, is not really different from what went before. It is still utterly concentrated, utterly exposed, requiring in its performance, no doubt as in its creation, not only complete determination and skill, and not only the luck of the moment, but also a moral bravery, a willingness to go out without any defences. It is also occupied with the same hard business of making statements in the face of meaninglessness and futility, the same passionate insistence that there are still questions to be asked, patterns to be made, even sometimes jokes to be cracked. At the same time, the profusion of the recent music entails the poverty that went before: it would mean something very different if it represented a norm maintained through four decades. Indeed, it is hard to see how that could have been possible. This is music that needed discipline and patience.

The putative turning-point work, *Kafka-Fragmente*, is the first to be considered here, and Kurtág's scrupulous dating of his manuscripts allows us some glimpse into how it came about. The beginnings—of what was to become a succession of thirty-eight fragments, occupying well over an hour and forming by themselves a complete concert programme, exalting and exhausting for both performers and audience—were made on 7 July 1985, when Kurtág began settings of two short extracts. Progress was slow at first, but then in August and September came a rush of twenty-eight settings, many of them needing only a single sheet of paper and finished in a day or two, as if they were diary entries, just as many of the texts come from diary entries (others are taken from Kafka's letters, and here too Kurtág followed his model, composing several of the pieces as homages and messages to friends and colleagues). Composition of more fragments continued then at a trickle before coming to a stop on 11 November 1986 with "Der begrenzte Kreis ist rein", which could be taken as a motto for the entire work, with the pride, the irony and the warning contained in the certainty of perfection as a round zero. Another possible motto from the Kafka texts—"Meine Gefängniszelle—meine Festung" (My prison cell—my fortress)—appears as a super-scription on the manuscript of each of the four parts into which the fragments are grouped.

One meaning of Kafka's conjoined antithesis would be that limitations—limitations of form, of resources, of subject matter as they are in this work—are strengths, that poverty is power. Schoenberg, writing in recommendation of Webern's Bagatelles for string quartet, asked his readers to "consider what moderation is required to express oneself so briefly". But it is not moderation that Kurtág's work suggests so much as an explosion of precisely inscribed aphorisms, prayers, jokes and parables and an explosion of new possibilities for the soprano voice and the violin. Kurtág is very definitely immoderate too in his expressive force, which suggests a mind knowing every area over which it is operating: every pitch, every duration, every area of uncertainty, every blind mechanism. We have to presume this intimacy, of the composer with his work, because the music is so full and immediate in its effect. But we know too, from the evidence of Csengery in particular, how Kurtág's music is the notation of discoveries and experiences he has lived and lived with, and how the aim of his intensive rehearsal periods is to encourage the performer to create something that is again alive. The score is a cold step from one charged intensity to another.

Between the completion of he *Kafka-Fragmente* and the work's first performance five months later, Kurtág completed two much smaller cycles for soprano and piano: *Three Old Inscriptions*, of which the centrepiece incorporated material going back twenty years to the period of *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza,* and *Requiem for the Beloved*, a Rimma Dalos set begun in 1980. The inscriptions are a diverse group: a fifteenth-century lyric, extremely quiet and distant, then a text from an eighteenth-century Transylvanian mangle, with hectic stretches of mangling in the piano, and finally a young woman's epitaph, set in the original German. *Requiem* is rather—like the earlier Dalos works, *Messages* and *Scenes* from a *Novel*—a drama in fragments, but even more abbreviated: a memory of a love affair in just four episodes.

Since the end of the 1970s Kurtág had published no purely instrumental music. Now, for three years after the first performance of the *Kafka-Fragmente*, he seems to have written little else. In December 1987 he started *...quasi una fantasia...*, finished eleven months later and so overlapping with the *Officium breve* (March 1988—January 1989). In the winter of 1988-9 he also wrote *Hölderlin: An...*, setting a fragment for tenor and piano, but the remaining works completed in 1989 were again instrumental: the *Message to Frances-Marie* for solo cello, the *Ligatura-Message*, and *Grabstein für Stephan.* This last piece had been started in 1978-9, as had *Hommage à R. Sch.* for clarinet, viola and piano, finished in January 1990, as if the concentration on instrumental music were enabling Kurtág to complete old projects. Other, new instrumental pieces followed: the *Ligature e Versetti* for organ (1990), the last two of the *3 in memoriam* for piano (April 1990. The first had been written in August 1988), and *Op. 27 No.2* (October 1989—November 1990.) Once again there was a single interruption of vocal music, the first version of *Samuel Beckett: What is the Word*, in which a Hungarian translation is set for contralto and piano (March 1990).

Various common features suggest themselves, one being the high proportion of memorials: the *Officium breve* for Kurtág's elder colleague Endre Szervánszky, the *Grabstein* for Stephan Stein, the three piano pieces. Death had been one of Kurtág's principal subjects at least since the *Bornemisza* settings. It may now, like words before, have provided a spur, a reason for saying something rather than nothing. What is said, in the more lapidary *tombeaux*, might be a wild scurry and clatter of fragments (the middle pi-

ano piece, "Hommage tardif à Karskaya") or a sustained, bare slow movement (the other piano pieces, "Szolcsányi György emlékére" and "In memoriam Maurice Fleuret", also *Grabstein*.

These are musical types with a long history in Kurtág's music, but with an even more imposing present in the case of the adagio. Quite apart from the explicit elegies, *Ligatura-Message* is a slow movement, and so is the finale of *Hommage à R. Sch.*, which seems of Mahlerian length when it comes after five much shorter movements. Such division into contrasted fragments—Schuman would have called them "fantasy pieces"—is itself another characteristic of Kurtág's music, and not only of this period. He belongs, with Schumann and Webern, in a tradition of lyric rather than developmental form, of fragments rather than movements. The *Officium breve* is the biggest such collection so far among the instrumental works, being asequence of fifteen fragments ranging in size from a single breath for solo cello through canons and slow movements to a transcription of the canonic finale from Webern's last work. There is also another quotation, curtailed to brevity from Szervánszky's Serenade for strings in the finale, "Arioso interrotto". This is paralleled by the discovery of simple diatonic melodies—naive, but frightening too in their context—in other works of this period, including the finale, which is again a slow finale, of *...quasi una fantasia...*

One respect in which the *Officium breve* and *Hommage à R. Sch.* are exceptional is in the simplicity and consistency of their scoring, for Kurtág's preference was suddenly for diverse groupings distributed within the auditorium. In the score of *...quasi una fantasia...*, for instance, he directs that ideally only the solo piano and timpani should be on stage, with the percussion (including vibraphone, marimba, cimbalom, celesta and harp) and five mouth organs scattered at a middle level, and the five woodwind, four brass and five strings in the heights. *Ligatura-Message* has two violins again placed up above, from where they answer the solo cello in a short antiphony ended by three chords from celesta (the antiphony can alternatively be played on two organs): the subtitle, "The Answered Unanswered Question", points to Ives as ancestor of this sort of spatial-music conundrum, though Kurtág's fragmentation of the ensemble parallels his own fragmentation of the work's duration, and similarly works to characterise particular stretches of music, and thereby to suggest a drama taking place in sound. *Grabstein für Stephan* is again a work of this kind. Like the cello in *Ligatura-Message*, playing weighty four-note chords (writing for Frances-Marie Uitti, Kurtág uses her technique of playing with two bows), the guitar in *Grabstein* plays only solemn chords, echoed, tormented and annulled by other instruments placed around the hall: the ensemble is similar to that of *...quasi una fantasia...*, but the dissolving into space can be greater, since the wind players are invited to leave the hall while still playing during the last two pages ofd the score, and the monument ends with a low, full horn tone sounding from outside.

The four movements of ...quasi una fantasia... begin with an introduction, in which the piano, barely audible, plays descending scales (present in much of Kurtág's recent music) against light accompaniment from percussion and mouth organs. Then comes a "Presto minaccioso e lamentoso (wie ein Traumeswirren)", rushing through the whole ensemble but still very quiet. The following "Recitativo" is therefore a shock, with its fortissimo chords marked "grave, disperato", but then the music goes back to the edge of silence for the final slow "Aria". *Op. 27 No.2* has a similar ensemble grouped around the solo piano, and another one, almost exactly identical, operating with the solo cello. In form,

though, the piece is quite different. Not only is this Kurtág's biggest score yet, requiring forty or so players, it is also his longest unbroken composition, the fragments now being carried in a contin uous flow of dialogue with parentheses, for fifteen minutes.

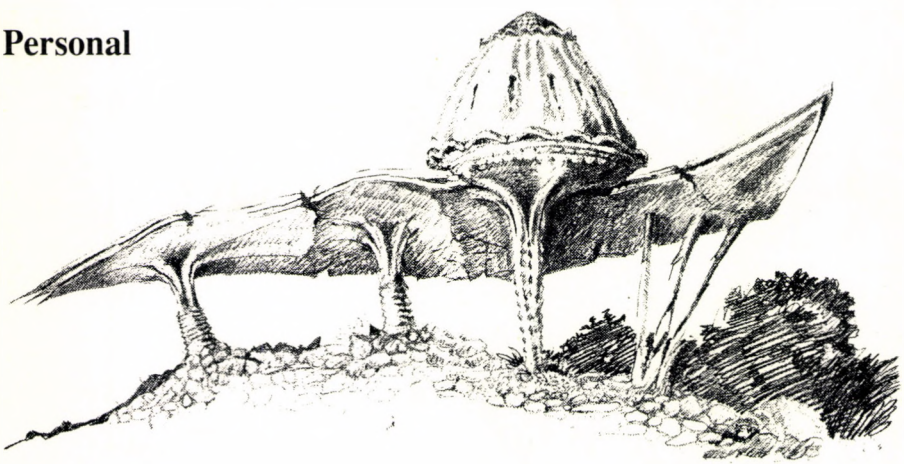
The new form of *Op.27 No.2*, sprawling and encompassing a single passage of time just as the music sprawls and encompasses the space in which it is being played, continues in the larger version of *Samuel Beckett: What is the Word*, completed in July 1991. This is a huge expansion or proliferation of the 1990 setting for low contralto (going down to D flat, nearly an octave below middle C) and piano, which is performed on the platform, by two musicians alongside the conductor. Simultaneously the original Beckett text is delivered by a madrigalian quintet, and there are groups of instruments placed up high, a combination like those of the preceding three concertante pieces: nine woodwind, seven brass, percussion (including pianino, celesta, harp and xylophone) and four strings. Just as the text goes in fruitless search of an appropriate vocabulary, coming to treasure each unsatisfactory word for itself before passing on, so the music revolves through characteristic gestures: the descending chromatic scale, the monotone, the tiny cantabile phrase, the emphatic affront. Tacked onto the end—seemingly an afterthought, but a brilliant one—is a "Sinfonia" in which a solo violinist, hitherto silent, plays and at the same time vocalises a snatch of trill, taken up by other instruments and voices. Kurtág calls this an "epilogo scenico", acknowledging the dramatic nature of the piece and fuelling hopes that he will go on to the Beckett opera that has long been expected from him.

Meanwhile the two works written since this compact oratorio show Kurtág continuing on his path. *Aus der Ferne III* is a little slow movement for string quartet, written in August 1991 for Alfred Schlee's ninetieth birthday, and placing threads of harmony and high tune over a tolling on the cello's lowest note. *Életút* (January-February1992) is a chain of canons and other games for two pianos joined by a pair of basset horns, and once more frequenting passages of naive melody. Both pieces, like all the others described here, are published by Editio Musica of Budapest.

Ft 250.–

Economists from the Central Statistical Office to professional associations surpass one another in their apocalyptic visions, but financial experts, whose stomach ulcers one normally takes for granted, keep issuing victory bulletins. The press is carrying a plethora of articles on the state of families reduced to poverty and harrowed by anxieties about making ends meet; however, the growth of cash incomes in 1990 and 1991 fell short of inflation by a bare 1-2 per cent. Yet no less than Ft195,000 million — i. e., almost one quarter of the population's total savings, which amounted to Ft865,000 million — was accumulated in the single year of 1991. One can read day after day press reports on privatization making no headway, but the fact is that 10 per cent of state enterprises are now in private hands and a further 20 per cent of them are owned by associations.

From: "A Convalescent Economy," by László Csaba, p. 3.



Architectural fantasy by László Vince